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SELECT EULOGIES

OF

MEMBERS OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY,

WITH NOTES;

By THE LATE M. D'ALEMBERT.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH,
WITH A PREFACE AND ADDITIONAL NOTES,

BY J. AIKIN, M. D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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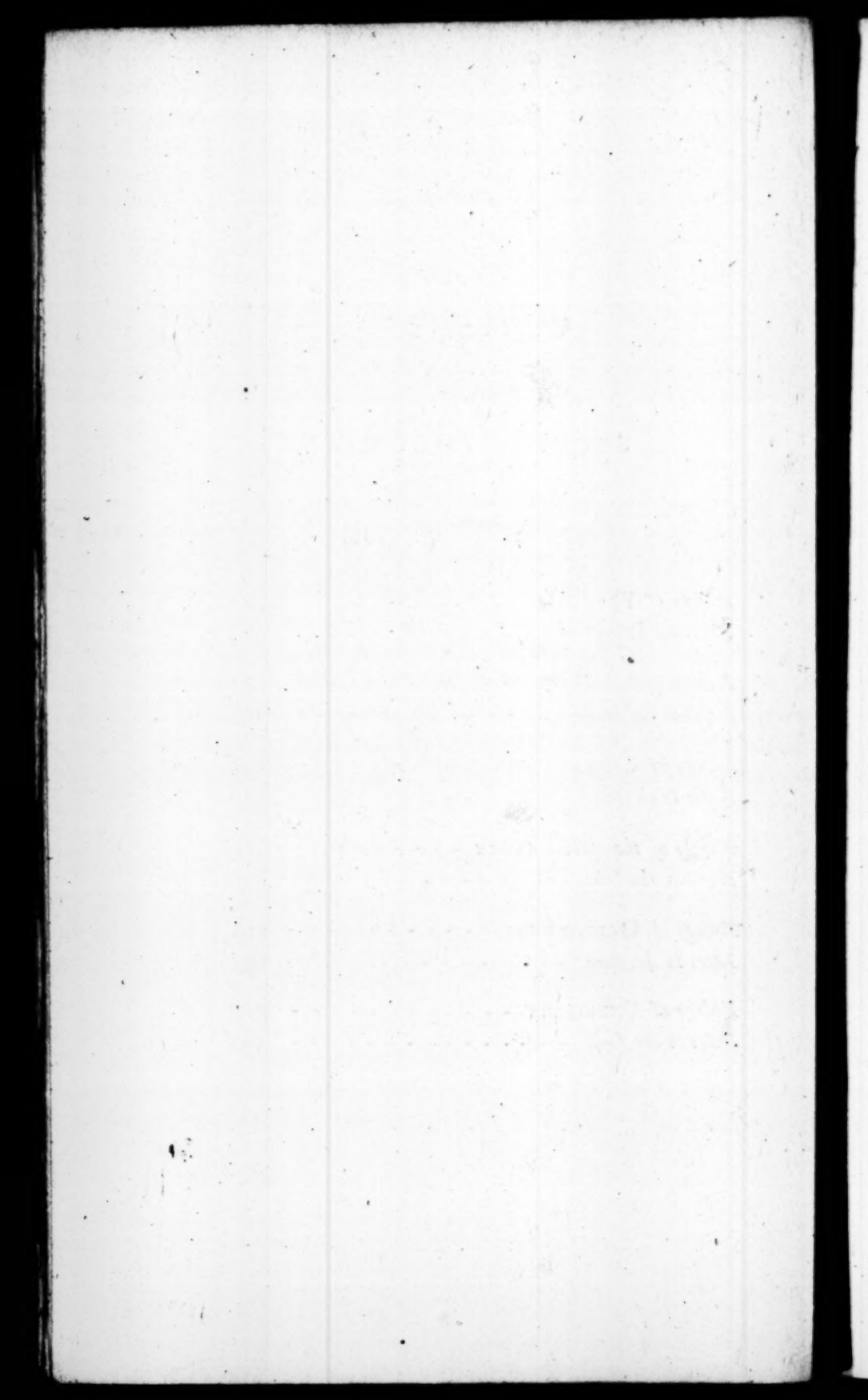
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EULOGY

OF

ESPRIT FLECHIER,

BISHOP OF NISMES *.

ESPRIT FLECHIER was born at Pernes in the county of Avignon, on June 10, 1632, of obscure and indigent parents, but descended from noble ancestors, who had even signalised themselves by their services : for, in the time of those abominable religious wars which attest the frenzy and barbarism of our forefathers, the protestants of the *comtat* having threatened to carry desolation through this fair province, Flechier's great-great-grandfather raised a

* Read Jan. 19, 1778.

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small

small army at his own expence, and saved his country. But this effort ruined him ; and his country, like many others, forgot its generous defender, who fell into poverty. His descendants, replete like himself with honour and disinterestedness, obtained the same reward, and, in their indigence, were almost lost from the memory of their fellow-citizens. Obligated for their subsistence to carry on a petty commerce, they lost (thanks to our modern prejudices !) even their quality of gentlemen, and only preserved that of men of worth ; a distinction little sought after, and much less flattering to human depravity than that homage which is paid by meanness to title, without talents or virtues.

Young Flechier was brought up by his uncle, father Hercules Audifret, superior-general of *the Christian Doctrine*, a man of parts and merit, author of some devotional works esteemed in their time though little known to our nice and critical age. The
eloquence

eloquence of this Doctrinary, then greatly renowned and singularly fertile, was always ready to succour those of his contemporary bishops and rectors who justly regarded preaching as one of their duties, but whose zeal God had not crowned with equal abilities. They requested from Hercules Audifret the favour of a few sermons, which they delivered with hesitation, and which their ungrateful flocks used to call the *labours of Hercules*.

Flequier, while his uncle lived, was a member of the congregation of which he was the head *. It was then a free one, like that of the Oratory, which has owed its success principally to this precious liberty, the most valuable possession to genius, the only one which the persecutors of this congregation ought to have envied it, yet the only one they have suffered it to retain. The Doctrinaries did not long enjoy the same advantage; for, after the

* See NOTE I.

death of Audifret, another general, who chose rather to command slaves than to govern freemen, brought his brethren into subjection by new regulations, to which Flechier did not think proper to submit. Thus the *Christian Doctrine*, through the tyranny of its head, irrevocably lost one of the men who would have rendered it most illustrious ; a natural effect of that despotism, which has in so many instances stifled talents in the cloister, and has banished or misted them in so many others. But the more determined Flechier was to sacrifice himself to religion, the more he wished that the sacrifice should have the perpetual merit of being voluntary, and should be prescribed by his heart alone, without being subjected, according to the expression of Bossuet, to any other spirit than that of the church, to any other rules than the canons, and to any other solemn vows than those of baptism and the priesthood.

Become

Become free, but without fortune or any other resource than in himself, Flechier came to Paris, whither talents, concealed in the provinces, resort when they acquire courage to make themselves known. He first pursued the walk he thought fittest to lead him to fame if not to riches. He became a poet, and commenced with some Latin verses describing the famous carousal given by Lewis XIV. a festival equally distinguished for brilliance and good taste, which astonished Europe as yet scarcely emerged from barbarism, and announced that magnificence of which the court of Versailles was so long the model. This description did the more honour to the poet, as it was extremely difficult to express, in the language of ancient Rome, a kind of spectacle and entertainment which it had never known, and for which Virgil or Ovid would have been obliged almost to create a new language. The success of the piece was, therefore, very great, at

least with that class of men of letters who believe that good verses may be made in a dead language, and whom Despreaux called "the modern apes of ancient Latinity." Flechier also wrote some French verses, which were judged less excellent, perhaps because they lay more open to judgment; they were, however, received with an indulgence which might pass for justice, since few better were then read; Corneille grew old, Despreaux had scarcely appeared, and Racine did not yet exist.

As our young poet, notwithstanding his promise of talents, was without protectors, because he was without intrigue, he was reduced to confine himself to a parish, where this man, destined one day to shine by his eloquence, was employed to teach children their catechism, and to give familiar exhortations to some old devotees who came to sleep instead of hearing him. He soon resigned in disgust his function
to

to assume another still more unpleasant, that of a preceptor * ; an office truly respectable in its object, but, among us, in a state of degradation, proceeding from the folly of parents, and often from the meanness of those who exercise like mercenaries so noble a profession. Flechier felt all its dignity, because he knew all its duties ; but for this very reason he also felt all its burden, which can appear light only to presumptuous ignorance, unworthy and incapable of sustaining it.

Having tried so many conditions of life and so many kinds of exertion for which he was not adapted, at length the irresistible impulse of nature led him into the true course for the display of his genius. He gave himself up to the labours of the pulpit, and raised a reputation which his funeral discourses carried to its summit. In the two first which he delivered (for Madame de Montausier and Madame d'Ai-

* See NOTE II.

guillon,) the matter was dry and barren ; yet, without having recourse to commonplace morality, the eternal burthen of these compositions, he knew how to interest his auditory by useful and pathetic truths, expressed with dignity and elegance. But a much greater and more worthy subject was reserved to his eloquence. He was appointed to preach the funeral oration for Turenne ; and he fulfilled in the most distinguished manner all the expectations that the celebrity of his hero and his own talents had raised. It was a difficult task to praise adequately, in the eyes of the nation, a man already praised in so affecting a manner by the lamentations of all France ; by the trouble and affright of those who fled from the fields no longer defended by him ; by the despair of the soldiers, who demanded to be led to revenge his death ; by the respect of the enemy, who honoured in him the humane and generous conqueror ; in
fine,

fine, by the regrets even of the courtiers, who were compelled by his modesty to pardon him his glory. From that public grief which, after satiating itself with tears, was now expressed by silence alone, Flechier was able still to draw some accents and a fresh flow of sorrow. His success was the more flattering, as it obliterated that which Mascaron bishop of Tulle had obtained on the same topic. They who had heard and applauded this last orator thought he could not be equalled, and assured him the victory over his rival. Thus prepossessed against admiration, they went to hear Flechier, and were forced to recognize him for victor *. Madame de Sevigné, who was among the number of these converts, and who speaks in her letters with rapture of Flechier's performance, did not suspect that in these letters she made a still more eloquent funeral eulogy for the hero of France, in

* See NOTE III.

painting the grief of the nation by those lively details of the public consternation, and those simple but affecting strokes, more touching from their very simplicity, which without art or study so well express the depth of the general affliction.

In his subsequent funeral orations, Flechier had no more Turennes to celebrate; but the public esteem, or severity, required almost as much from him as if he had still possessed the same advantage. Notwithstanding this formidable disposition in his auditors, he happily sustained a reputation which it was so difficult to prevent from declining. He effected this by his attention, even while he rose above his subject, never to seem to quit it; by avoiding that exaggeration, which, in attempting to aggrandize little things, makes them appear still less; and especially by a constant respect for truth, so frequently and shamefully violated in this kind of composition. In his works we do not see that falsehood, which

which has beset the great during their lives, come crouching about their tombs, in order to pollute their ashes with vile incense, and to celebrate their virtues before an audience which has only known their vices. Flechier felt the indignation of a man of worth against such a debasement of the art of oratory. He has expressed this sentiment with true sublimity in his funeral oration for the duke de Montausier, in which we find this admirable stroke, which Demosthenes or Bossuet might have envied him: "Could I dare to employ
 " falsehood in the eulogy of a man who
 " was truth itself, this tomb would open,
 " these bones would be re-animated to
 " ask me, Why do you come to speak
 " falsely for me who never spoke falsely
 " for any one?" Let us, however, confess, with the author of the eloquent
 " Essay on Eulogies," that the governor
 of a dauphin being Flechier's subject, he
 does not seem to have felt all its dignity
 and

and interest. He has painted with too feeble a touch the noble and hazardous function of educating the heir of a great kingdom; the almost insurmountable difficulty of making him feel the nothingness of his grandeur, in an ostentatious and servile court; of inspiring him with horror of vice, in the seat of seduction; of rendering him at the same time sensible to glory and deaf to flattery; of preserving him equally from that credulity which encourages falsehood, and from that excessive distrust which repels truth; and of unfolding to him all the arts practised to deceive or corrupt him, and, nevertheless, teaching him to love his fellow-creatures. It is extraordinary that Bossuet, who was joined with Montausier in the education of the prince, and by the character of his genius was so fitted for painting this grand subject, should have left it to another pencil than his own. Was his silence political; and was the eloquent Bossuet afraid
either

either of drawing too natural a portrait of the court he was to paint, or, through excess of caution, of sinking beneath his subject?

The reputation of Flechier's funeral discourses has continued to our times ; we may add, that they are worthy of this distinction, if we recollect that they were delivered at a period when the genuine laws of eloquence were as yet little known. Their style is not only pure and correct, but full of sweetness and elegance. To purity of diction the orator joins a facile and soothing, though full and numerous harmony ; a harmony which our most celebrated writers had at that time confined to their verse, and which no one had yet introduced into French prose, except Balzac, in whose writings it is too often exaggerated, obtruding, and nearly as inflated as his language. Poetry, to which Flechier had given his attention before he mounted the pulpit, and by which he had,

as it were, preluded to eloquence, had rendered him very sensible to the charms resulting from the happy arrangement of words. We feel in reading him that he had commenced with being a poet; and in reality nothing is more useful to an orator, in forming an ear, than to make verses, good or bad; as it is of advantage to young people to take some lessons in dancing, in order to walk gracefully. Flechier's merit in having been our model for harmonious prose, should plead his pardon for the faults which may be remarked in his mode of writing. There is scarcely any orator who has not his favourite figure, which he employs in preference, and often faultily. Antithesis is the favourite of Flechier, and frequently his stumbling-block. It perpetually appears in his works, and almost always consists rather in the words than the thoughts. This continual uniformity of oppositions, sometimes puerile and frivolous, is remote
from

from the language of grief, which abandons itself to its emotions, and does not think of measuring out its expressions. From these symmetrical and accumulated contrasts there results a monotony in his discourses, which fatigues and would at length chill the reader, were it not from time to time interrupted and animated by strokes of pathetic sensibility, which by their warmth impart a light breath of life to the whole mass. This tinge of the pathetic became still more sensible when these orations were pronounced by their author. His serious action, and his slow and somewhat feeble voice, brought the hearer into a disposition of sympathetic sorrow : the soul felt itself gradually penetrated by the simple expression of the sentiment, and the ear by the soft cadence of the periods. Hence he was sometimes obliged to make a pause in the pulpit, that he might leave a free course to plaudits, not of the tumultuous kind which resound
at

at our profane spectacles, but expressed by that general and modest murmur which eloquence wrests, even in our temples, from an audience deeply moved ; a kind of involuntary explosion of the public enthusiasm, which not even the sanctity of the place can repress. This enthusiasm, it is true, has greatly diminished since the funeral orations of Flechier have had only readers ; but, notwithstanding his defects, the author seems, in this difficult kind of composition, to have preserved that second place which his age allotted him. The interval between him and Bossuet will be made greater or less, in proportion as readers are more or less hurried away by the impetuous eloquence of the one, or seduced by the harmonious elegance of the other. But it seems at least decided, that the other oracles of the pulpit, Massillon and Bourdaloue, so different from themselves in their funeral orations and their sermons, cannot be placed in this interval.

Perhaps

Perhaps we should venture to add, that it has been filled up in our time, and that the Academy enjoys this glory in the person of one of its members *, did we not know the danger of comparing and appreciating living authors, when we wish to avoid shocking either the modesty or the vanity of any individual.

The sobriety of action which had contributed to the success of Flechier's funeral orations, was hurtful to his sermons, which, moreover, derived little animation from their studied composition. He appeared cold and languid in a species of discourse which required energy, heat, and vehemence, and in which his soft harmony was ill calculated to move his hearers, still less to convert them. Hence, although due merit was allowed to these productions, written with unvarying purity, and

* See the funeral orations of the late dauphin, the late queen, and especially of the late king, by the abbé de Boissmont.

even with elevation, his funeral orations have caused them to be entirely forgotten.

He was scarcely more successful in his "Panegyrics of Saints;" and appeared less fitted to praise the heroes of religion than those of the world. Perhaps the difficulties attendant upon the eulogy of the Great whetted his faculties, and presented an object of emulation to his eloquence, which the eulogy of Saints did not afford. The distance to which the latter personages are removed from us, and the habit we have acquired of hearing them praised, render us more indifferent to these praises, and more indulgent to the panegyrist: funeral orations, on the contrary, placing before us men with whom we have lived, excite a much more lively curiosity as to the features with which the orator means to paint his hero, and the art he is to employ in concealing his defects. We secretly challenge him to rise
to

to the dignity of his subject in the eulogy of great men ; to fill up the void in that of ordinary persons ; and to clear away embarrassments in that of persons who have had great vices, or committed great faults. But this very challenge is the only spur adapted to rouse to exertion genuine abilities : nothing interests them so much as the honour of striving against great obstacles ; whereas they are sure to languish when effort is unnecessary.

Flequier had read much of the old sermons, as Virgil read Ennius in order to extract from " his dunghil the particles " of gold concealed there." In these relics of Gothic barbarism he sought those strokes of simple and untutored eloquence which sometimes sparkle in them, like flashes of lightning in a dark night ; and he had the happiest skill in applying them to his purpose. It is thus that, in his funeral oration on Turenne, he has made use of the brilliant and pathetic parallel be-

tween his hero and Judas Maccabeus. An ancient preacher had already honoured the memory of a certain prince with this parallel ; but he knew not how either to apply his comparison so fitly, or to improve it so eloquently. Flechier alleged that he derived another advantage from the perusal of these superannuated writers, whom he called his *buffoons* ; which was, that of acquiring a nicer feeling of the faults with which they abound, and thereby learning more effectually to avoid them. But by this familiarity he sometimes, without perceiving it, contracted that affected manner of thinking which he studied only to avoid. He embellished indeed the faults of the old preachers, but he rendered them the more dangerous by this embellishment ; and it has been ingeniously said of him, that he preached in an antique taste, with a modern style*.

* See NOTE IV.

Far, however, from reproaching our orator for the slight deviations into which he was sometimes led by the study of bad models, we ought rather to be surprized that his taste was not ruined beyond remedy by the detestable lessons of eloquence he had received in his youth. His master was a miserable rhetorician named Riche-source, who, pretending to be a model in the art of speaking and writing, was unfortunately able to attract a number of pupils, and gave himself the title of "Rec-tor of the Academy of Philosophical Orators." The grateful, though ill-instructed disciple, addressed a madrigal to his master, but did not carry his gratitude so far as to imitate him *.

They who are fond of making comparisons, at the hazard of violating resemblance in their portraits, have compared Flechier to Racine, and Bossuet to Corneille. It has more justly been said, that

* See NOTE V.

nothing could be more different than the first pair, or less resembling than the second. Flechier has no quality in common with Racine but one, which they share with many writers, elegance and purity of style. But even this elegance has not the same character in both : that of the poet, always facile, appears to flow from the fountain-head ; that of the orator, always studied, betrays, if we may so speak, the line and compass. Further, what a distance between them, with respect to truth, feeling, and taste ! Flechier, in speaking of his hero, occupies your attention with himself ; you forget Racine, while you attend to his characters. The first aims at affecting his hearers, yet affects them but feebly ; the second requires no effort to affect his audience, because he himself has commenced with being warmly affected ; and no one ever knew or practised better the maxim, " If you would have me weep, " you must weep yourself." Flechier, in
fine,

fine, often ingenious, seldom pathetic, the model of a regular and studied harmony, is in eloquence, what an excellent composer of sonatas is in music : Racine, always pathetic, never attempting to appear ingenious, enchanting us by his harmony without seeming to have sought it, produces the same effect on the ear and the soul by his verses, with that of the most expressive and affecting vocal melody.

If there is a somewhat greater resemblance between Bossuet and Corneille, still it is much less than is commonly supposed. Elevation is doubtless the character of both ; but the elevation of Corneille has the stamp of republican pride ; that of Bossuet, of religious enthusiasm. Corneille holds greatness and power in defiance ; Bossuet treads them under foot, to rise as high as Deity itself : the first, by displaying to us man in all his dignity, aggrandizes us in our own eyes ; the second, by shewing him in all his nothingness,

ness, seems to soar above the human race. The sublimity of the poet has more profundity, more feature, more thought; that of the orator has more majesty, more vehemence, more imagery. The negligences of Corneille proceed from lassitude and exhaustion; those of Bossuet, from excess of heat and fertility. In Corneille, when the expression is familiar, it is almost always ignoble; in Bossuet, when the idea is grand, the familiarity of the expression seems to render it still grander.

Flequier's eloquence summoned him to the French Academy. He was admitted on the same day with Racine*; and spoke before him with such applause, that the author of "Andromache" and "Britannicus" despaired of equal success. The great poet was so intimidated and disconcerted in the presence of that public, which had so often crowned him at the theatre,

* Jan. 12, 1673; in the place of Anthony Godeau, bishop of Vence.

that

that he could only stammer out his discourse, and was scarcely heard, though this did not prevent him from being judged. His failure, rendered more observable by the success of Flechier, appeared to him so complete and irreparable, that his self-love lost the usual resource of hoping more justice from the press. Without regret or complaint he suppressed this unfortunate production; but he must have derived consolation, were it necessary, from the oblivion to which Flechier's discourse was soon abandoned, the certain fate of all works which have only a local and occasional merit. This little academical disgrace incurred by the great Racine, should console those who undergo the like; though it is true that few will be found equally capable of obliterating it*.

Besides the oratorical works of Flechier, he has left us a collection of letters, in

* See NOTE VI.

which

which the profusion of ingenuity is still more conspicuous than in his pieces of eloquence, because it is still less in its place. The merit of the epistolary style is an amiable negligence; and Flechier did not permit himself to be negligent in a letter, any more than in a funeral oration. But if he is rarely simple, even when writing to his friends, he is at least always dignified with the great, always decorous with his equals and inferiors, always replete with zeal for the church and state,—in a word, always a citizen, a man, and a bishop; a merit so valuable in letters of this kind, that it excuses the want of every other.

He likewise exercised himself in historical composition. His History of Theodosius, though written in a manner too remote from the requisite simplicity, is an interesting work. He is, however, charged with being too much the panegyrist of his hero; a prince, doubtless, worthy of high commend-

commendation in the annals of the church, but not without his faults in the rigorous judgment of history. Yet, if a most laudable motive can excuse want of fidelity in a historian, Flechier may be pardoned for having palliated the defects of an emperor whom he meant as a model to the dauphin; for he wrote this history for the instruction of the heir-apparent. Montausier and Bossuet, who presided over the education of this prince, were particularly solicitous to make him a religious monarch, who should at least fear God, if he should think he had nothing to dread from man. They conceived that the most efficacious means of inspiring the young prince with a sentiment so necessary to kings, was to place before his eyes a sovereign dear to religion. They chose the history of Theodosius, and employed Flechier, whom each of them greatly esteemed, in writing it *. Montausier especially,

* See NOTE VII.

who

who had early known him, was highly delighted with him; and he thought himself the more obliged to render him the justice he merited, as the young orator had begun with exciting his displeasure. The courtly misanthrope, as is well known, affected an extraordinary horror for adulation. Flechier, whose temper was as gentle and engaging as his style, and who thought Montausier as kindly disposed as other men to his own praises, began with heaping them upon him without measure. The only acknowledgment he received was the blunt and severe retort, "This is one of your flatterers!" Apprized by this reproach of the singular character of his Mæcenæ, he no longer forbore contradicting him, and soon obtained his friendship and confidence. He knew that an almost infallible method to gain the favour of misanthropy, is to furnish it with occasions to exercise itself; because, the affectation of this turn being a sure secret for becoming

I

remark.

remarkable, that person is agreeable to the misanthrope who provides food for the humour which is to assist his celebrity. Flechier himself somewhere observes, "No
 " one reviles mankind, but through the
 " desire of engaging the notice of man-
 " kind ;" and we may here apply the remark of the dying Otho, " It is when
 " we are attached to life that we speak ill
 " of gods or men *."

Flechier likewise wrote the history of the famous cardinal Ximenes ; but his work was eclipsed by that on the same subject published about the same time by Marfollier. Flechier had represented his hero scarcely in any other light than as a religious prelate ; Marfollier had drawn him as a politic minister ; and the public took more interest in the portrait of the ambitious and intriguing churchman, than of the really or pretendedly devout cordelier. Flechier would have borne away the prize

* See NOTE VIII.

had

had he melted together, as it were, these two portraits, so striking from their contrast, and painted this celebrated personage politic and devout at the same time, skillfully employing the popular faith to promote his views, and securing his power by those arms which religion renders so efficacious in the hands of a minister. This is the view a philosophical historian will take of those men who, invested with the dignities of the church, have applied to the support of their credit or authority that respect which their condition inspired, and have so well availed themselves of it as frequently to become formidable even to sovereigns. It is because the history of the popes has never been written in this spirit, that one worthy of being read by men of enlightened minds is yet a desideratum. The annals of the court of Rome, which ought to be composed by a Tacitus, have hitherto been written only by exasperated Protestants, or timid Catholics; and

we

we may say of those writers what Tacitus himself has said of his contemporary historians, "*Neutris cura posteritatis, inter infensos vel obnoxios;*"—"Between hatred and obligation, all regard to the instruction of posterity was lost *."

In his history of Ximenes, however, Flechier records one observation which is worth the whole work: "This cardinal," says he, "laid it down as a principle, that a private man, when calumniated, seldom owes an apology to other men; but that a prince, unjustly accused, always owes it to his subjects."

The abilities of Flechier were recompensed as all abilities were in the reign of Lewis XIV.; he was nominated to the bishopric of Lavaur. The monarch, who knew how to enhance his favours by the manner in which he granted them, said to him, "I have made you wait some time

* See NOTE IX.

" for

“ for a place which you have long de-
 “ served, but I was unwilling sooner to
 “ deprive myself of the pleasure of hear-
 “ ing you.” From Lavour he was trans-
 lated to Nismes, but not without a long
 resistance. He wrote a pressing and pa-
 thetic letter to the king, in order to obtain
 his consent to his refusal ; and, from the
 air of earnestness and truth which pre-
 vails in it, we may clearly perceive that
 Flechier was not one of those ambitious
 hypocrites, who, while they feebly reject
 the offers of advancement, would be very
 sorry to be taken at their word ; and who
 wish to unite the reputation for disinterest-
 edness to the advantages of fortune. The
 king could only overcome his repugnance
 by representing to him, that much more
 good was to be done in his new church
 than in that he was so averse to quit ; that
 the offer made him was not of greater
 riches, but of greater toil ; and that so
 important an interest ought to be the mea-
 sure

sure and motive of his ambition *. The dioceſe of Niſmes was at that time full of Calviniſts, and conſequently the more difficult to govern, as it was neceſſary to combine zeal for making converts, with patience to prepare and wait for the proper ſeaſon. The edict of Nantes had juſt been revoked; and the violent perſecution which the Reformed underwent agitated and heated men's minds. To theſe ſpirits, exaſperated and exalted by the idea of martyrdom, it was neceſſary to give a paſtor whoſe knowledge, eloquence, and mildneſs were equally fitted to remove their prejudices and quiet their murmurs. Of this no one was more capable than Flechier; and he fully answered the expectations his wiſdom and talents had raiſed. He made more proſelytes by his moderation, than the intendant of the province by the ſeverity he employed againſt thoſe

* See Note X.

victims of religious fanaticism or political devotion. The sensibility, the indulgence, the charity, which guided and inspired this virtuous prelate, still breathe in the charges and pastoral letters he addressed to the Reformed. We behold a father who speaks with tenderness to his erring children, who exhorts without irritating them, and who laments to see faithful subjects torn from their country, forced either to quit or to fight against it. His conduct with respect to them was the more worthy of praise, since, actuated by the spirit of the age rather than his own, he did not adopt, or rather he was ignorant of, those principles of wisdom, which philosophy, enlightened by humanity, and even by religion, has so solidly established in our days;—principles which, at the commencement of the present century, had not time to germinate and ripen even in sound understandings and worthy hearts. The bishop of Nîmes, persuaded, in com-

mon

mon with almost all Catholics at that period, that instruction was not the sole means of vanquishing heresy, thought that motives of fear might be employed to recall Protestants to the bosom of the church. Yet he did not permit the use, or rather the trial of these methods, but in cases where their success was certain, where motives of fear were to serve as pretexts for the conversion of proselytes already convinced, and where authority might lend an effectual aid to grace. The sweetness of his temper yielded, if we may so express it, the least possible ground to his religious zeal for the extirpation of Calvinism. A constant opponent of the bitter and fanatic zeal of most of the converters of his time, he was persuaded that neither authority nor terror should be employed against those of the Reformed who gave no hope of change; and he was very far from approving the evils inflicted upon them. With a little more courage he would have

raised his voice in favour of these unfortunate persons ; he would have threatened with the divine wrath, and the indignation of posterity, those who commanded and executed acts of violence : but perhaps he was restrained by the fear of irritating the persecutors, and augmenting the evils he would have wished to alleviate. If he was not happy enough to put an end to so many calamities, he at least did not, like many others, superadd reproach and insult to the vexations undergone by the Protestants. He knew too well that, in the defence of truth, declamations against its adversaries prove nothing but the weakness of the defender, and his own opinion of this weakness. Hence the Protestants of Languedoc to this day bestow benedictions on the memory of a bishop who shewed himself so fully inspired with the genuine spirit of the church, and so worthy to restore all his children to peace and gentleness. Even the fanatics re-

spected in their ravages the places inhabited by Flechier ; as the enemies who then laid waste our frontiers respected the abode of Fenelon. Far different were the feelings of the Reformed with regard to the intendant Baviile, who, possessed of virtues and intelligence as a minister, and upright in the functions of his office, has rendered himself but too famous in the Protestant annals by his inexorable severity towards the votaries of error. But, attached to the principles of absolute power, he thought himself obliged by the duties of his station to execute with the most inflexible rigour the edicts emitted from the throne against the Protestants ; edicts which he took for the will of the king, but which most frequently were only that of his ministers *. The intendant and the prelate,

* Considering that Lewis XIV. was bigotted to his religion, and impatient of all resistance to his authority, there is no reason to suppose that he would

prelate, from the difference of their characters, though united by mutual friendship, were often divided concerning those objects of administration which required their joint authority. "The bishop," said Baviile one day, on occasion of a dispute between them, "has made me "change white for black."—"Say rather," replied Flechier, "black for "white *.

What particularly afflicted the bishop of Nîmes, in the troubles to which he was witness, was the fatal advantage given to the Reformed by the ignorance and immorality of the clergy of his diocese. He represented to his parochial priests, that in vain the ark of the Lord was in their hands, if they were too feeble to sup-

not heartily concur in any measures, however severe, against those whom he regarded as not only the enemies of God, but as rebels to himself. TRANSL.

* See NOTE XI.

port

port it against the efforts of heresy for its overthrow ; and he exhorted the canons of his cathedral to put to silence the enemies of the church by a regularity of which they had unhappily lost the taste and habit. To his discourses he joined the most striking proof of the sincerity of his zeal, the only one which can shelter zeal from calumny—purity of manners and sanctity of life : far different from those declaimers, seemingly so ardent for the doctrines of religion, and really so lax as to its precepts, who find it a shorter and easier task to harden and disgust unbelievers by their insults, than to edify and subdue them by their example.

Flequier was not less careful to destroy those superstitions which afforded matter of scandal, and consequently of triumph, to Protestants. Notwithstanding a bull of the pope in their favour, he opposed the establishment of a confraternity of White Penitents, whose processions he termed

“ pious masquerades.” He published a very eloquent pastoral letter on a pretended miraculous cross, in which he declares himself against those (to use his own words) “ who put their confidence in “ wood, and in lying prodigies ;” and threatens to overthrow this cross, if the people continue to pay it a blind and fanatical worship. “ If,” says he, “ I perceive Israel become idolatrous, I shall “ break the brazen serpent *.”

The charity which he exercised towards that part of his flock which had wandered from the fold, was still more conspicuous towards those who, in the bosom of the church itself, had occasion for his indulgence and succour. An unhappy young woman, whom barbarous parents had constrained to take the veil, but whom nature had disposed to love, had been so unfortunate as to give way to a sentiment forbidden by her vows, and to be unable

* See NOTE XII.

conceal

to conceal from her superior the deplorable consequences of her weakness. Flechier was informed that this superior had punished her in the most cruel manner, by shutting her up in a dungeon, where, stretched upon a little straw, and reduced to a morsel of bread reluctantly given, she invoked death as the sole termination of her woes. The bishop repaired to the convent, and, after much resistance, caused the door to be opened of the horrid recess where this poor creature lay consuming in despair. As soon as she saw her pastor, she stretched out her arms to him, as to a deliverer sent by the mercy of Heaven. The prelate, casting an eye of horror and indignation on the superior, said to her, “ I ought, did I listen only to human
 “ justice, to cause you to be put in the
 “ place of this wretched victim of your
 “ barbarity ; but the God of mercy,
 “ whose minister I am, commands me to
 “ practise, even towards you, that lenity
 “ which

“ which you have not shewn to her. Go,
 “ and for your only penance read every day
 “ in the gospel the chapter of the woman
 “ taken in adultery.” He immediately
 removed the poor nun from her dreadful
 habitation; ordered that the greatest care
 should be taken of her, and strictly
 watched over the execution of his orders.
 But the charitable hand which had freed
 her from her tormentors, could not restore
 her to life: after some months of languish-
 ing, she died, pouring blessings on the
 name of her virtuous bishop, and hoping
 from the Supreme Goodness that pardon
 which had been denied her by monastic
 cruelty.

While the bishop of Nismes alleviated
 as far as lay in his power the evils occa-
 sioned by the malice of mankind, he con-
 soled his unfortunate flock under the
 afflictions with which Providence was
 pleased to try them. To an aged and in-
 firm person he wrote, “ Resign yourself
 “ into

“ into the hand of God ; he sends upon
 “ his children no sufferings but what they
 “ are able to bear.” In the scarcity of
 1709, his charities were immense, and
 equally shared between Catholics and Pro-
 testants, the measure being what they en-
 dured, not what they believed. He re-
 fused to employ the fund destined to alms
 in the construction of a church. “ What
 “ anthems,” said he “ are of equal value
 “ with the benedictions of the poor ; and
 “ what spectacle is more worthy the sight
 “ of God, than the tears of the indigent
 “ wiped away by his ministers ?” When
 the excess of his zeal and charity was men-
 tioned to him, “ Are we bishops for no-
 “ thing ?” he cried. He has more than
 once been seen, with a simplicity worthy
 of the primitive ages, walking on foot
 through the streets of Nismes, distributing
 alms with one hand, and his blessing with
 the other. He thought these public acts
 of episcopal beneficence the best answer to
 the

the malignant remarks of the Protestants on the pomp of the Romish church. He knew, however, to conceal this beneficence when it fell upon persons forced by their condition to make a secret of their indigence. He then added to the ready and abundant relief he gave, those delicate attentions which prevent alms from being humiliating, but which piety itself thinks it unnecessary to observe towards the wretched, when it regards charity rather as a religious duty, than as the gratification of a feeling heart.

With such talents and virtues, it will readily be believed that Flechier was free from pride. The son of a poor tallow-chandler, arrived at the episcopacy, he had neither the folly to conceal the obscurity of his birth, nor that more refined vanity which might have sought in this very obscurity a pretext for vain-glory, while measuring with secret complacency the distance between the point whence he
set

set out, and that which he had reached. Once, however, he was urged to step out of his usual simplicity, by the necessity of replying to a court-prelate, who, having no other merit than his ancestry, held himself dishonoured by recognising in Flechier a brother whom God had made eloquent, charitable, and virtuous, but had not made a gentleman. He thought it very strange that such a person should have been taken from his father's shop to be placed on the episcopal bench, and he had the mean folly to shew him his surprise. "With this way of thinking," answered the bishop of Nîmes, "I fear that if you had been born what I was, you would have been a maker of candles *." It is also related, that the marshal de la Feuillade, that intrepid flatterer of Lewis XIV. who repaid himself for his humble adulation of his master, by airs of haughtiness towards all who he

* See NOTE XII.

thought

thought would suffer them, dared to say to Flechier, " You must confess that your father would be greatly astonished to see you what you are."—" Perhaps less so than you suppose," replied the prelate; " for it is not the son of my father, it is I, who have been made a bishop." These answers must be excused in modesty obliged to impose silence on pride; for true modesty is like true courage, which never offers an affront, but knows how to repel one, at least when the person offering it is not so vile as to merit only contempt.

Flechier, some time before his death, had a dream which he took for a presage of his approaching end. He immediately ordered a sculptor to make a very modest design for his tomb; for he feared lest gratitude or vanity should raise to his ashes a monument too conspicuous, and force him, in a manner, after his death, to assume the ostentation he had so much despised

despised when living. The sculptor made two designs ; but the prelate's nephews prevented him from shewing them to their uncle, wishing, if possible, to remove from his mind an idea afflicting to them, if it were not to him. Flechier complained of this delay, of which the sculptor could not conceal the cause. " My nephews," said the prelate, " have perhaps done as they ought, but do you do what I have desired." He examined the two designs, chose the simplest, and said to the artist, " Begin the work, for there is no time to lose." He died shortly afterwards, on February 16, 1710, wept by the Catholics, regretted by the Protestants, and leaving to his brethren a worthy model of zeal and charity, simplicity and eloquence. His funeral oration, drawn up by a very moderate orator, was not even delivered. It would, however, have been just, that one who had so well praised others, should himself have been

been praised by a voice equally eloquent ; and Turenne, from the depth of his tomb, seemed to cry to all the clergy of France to pay a debt, which no one at that time could or would acquit. Fenelon alone pronounced the funeral eulogy of the bishop of Nîmes, by saying, “ We have “ lost our master.” Thus the only one of Flechier’s brethren who was then his superior (for Bossuet no longer existed) was the only one whose modesty paid homage to the talents of him who had imitated his virtues. The intendant Baviile, though little resembling either of these, caused some lines to be engraved on Flechier’s tomb ; and even the Protestants applauded the epitaph of the prelate whom they regarded as their father, though composed by the magistrate whom they named their persecutor.

NOTES
TO THE
EULOGY OF FLECHIER.

NOTE I.

WHILE Flechier was yet in the congregation of the Christian Doctrine, he was professor of rhetoric in the college belonging to these fathers at Narbonne. His obligation to write a great deal of Latin in this employment did not prevent him from feeling the difficulty in a modern of appearing tolerable after Cicero, Virgil, and Horace, in a language no longer spoken. He expressed his sentiments on this subject in a Latin poem "on Modern Latinity," in which he used his best endeavours not to give at the same time the criticism and the example.

Obliged also, by the irksome duty of his office, to compose Latin pieces for the theatre, he wrote one on the subject of Isaac, or " the Unbloody Sacrifice," to which he gave the title of a tragi-comedy, because, as he said, it appeared to him neither comic in its subject, nor tragic in its conclusion. The term of *drama*, not yet invented for these pieces of an equivocal and neutral kind, would have served him more happily on this occasion.

For the ungrateful toil of these Latin tasks he made himself amends, when he met with a happy opportunity, by some compositions in French. He delivered, before the states of Languedoc, a funeral oration for Claude de Rebé, archbishop of Narbonne. This discourse, which he composed and committed to memory in ten days, was highly applauded ; and the success of this first attempt must have apprized the orator of the true path to fame which nature pointed out to him.

NOTE II.

FLECHIER was preceptor to the son of M. de Caumartin, counsellor of state; who being nominated by the king one of the commissioners for holding the *Grands Jours* (Great Assises) in Auvergne, was accompanied by the tutor and pupil. These *Grands Jours* were extraordinary commissions formerly appointed by the king to go into the provinces to hear the complaints of the people, and render justice; and it is a misfortune that they no longer exist, though the necessity for them has not ceased. Flechier wrote an account of those held at Riom in 1665. It is a kind of gallant history, which proves that, with all his strictness of morals, he was well enough versed in the frivolous language suited to this species of writing. In his narration the author speaks of some harangues made to the magistrates, in which it is affirmed that St. Augustin and

St. Ambrose had prophesied this *great event* ; and the severe sentences that were about to be pronounced are compared to the terrors of the general judgment. As the account is but half printed, we are left in ignorance of these severe sentences, the recital of which would have been more interesting than gallantry and ridiculous harangues.

NOTE III.

THE funeral oration for Turenne not only eclipsed that of Mascaron ; the nation seemed for a moment to place Flechier by the side of Bossuet, though the latter was already known by two of his capital performances, the funeral orations for the queen of England, and for her daughter. But if the contemporaries of these two orators hesitated for some time which to prefer, they soon united in estimating the unequal sublimity of the bishop of Meaux, beyond the constant but somewhat cold elegance

elegance of the bishop of Nîmes. The funeral orations for the dauphiness, and the duke de Montausier, were written and delivered at a very short distance of time from each other. Flechier, in fact, composed with extreme facility, and in all places, on a stone table, in a garden, and in a circle of company. "It is thought," said he, "that I compose with toil and effort; but this is a mistake. I have worked hard in my youth, and made advantage of every moment. Did composition cost me much, I should long ago have renounced it."

NOTE IV.

BESIDES the old French sermon-writers from whom he freely borrowed any thought that struck him, he carefully perused the sermons and homilies of the fathers of the church, and had even made copious extracts from them, which were lost after his death. He greatly esteemed

Balzac for the harmony of his periods, but disliked the inflation of his style. He also held in some esteem le Camus, bishop of Bellay, the author of so many works now forgotten; but censured him for a profusion of ingenious turns, and a fertility often leading to abuse.

NOTE V.

THIS Richesource is mentioned along with Laferre, in one of Despréaux's reflections on Longinus, as a model of nonsense, and meanness of style. It is recorded of this unfortunate rhetorician, that a very bad writer having been to hear one of his lectures, came to him at the end of it, and thus addressed him in the midst of his audience: "I come, Sir, to
 " render you the justice which is your
 " due. I thought myself the first writer
 " of the age for fustian; you have unde-
 " ceived me; for I have heard more of it
 " from you in the course of an hour, than
 " I have printed during my whole life."

NOTE VI.

RACINE, some years afterwards, obtained a compensation for his want of success at his reception in the Academy. He was appointed to admit Thomas Corneille in the place of his illustrious brother. More inured to the presence of the public, the author of "Phædra" now appeared like himself. His discourse on this occasion is among the finest of those delivered before the Academy. It is still daily read; whereas no one now reads that of Flechier, which is in fact a very middling performance, little worthy even of its temporary success.

NOTE VII.

FLECHIER has left an excellent letter on the utility of history, and on the qualifications of an historian. He might be reproached with not having rigorously followed his own rules concerning historical

rical truth and impartiality, in his history of Theodosius; but that was a commanded work, a kind of *Cyropædia*, written under the inspection of Bossuet, and particularly intended to instruct the dauphin in the duties of a pious and Christian monarch. Flechier's history of Ximenes rendered him so celebrated in Spain, that most of his works were translated into Spanish.

NOTE VIII.

THE duke de Montausier, to whom his friends applied the eulogy given to Vespasian, " Venerabilis senex, & patientissimus veri,"—" A venerable old man, " most tolerant of truth," furnishes a remarkable proof, that the most resolute sincerity cannot always withstand that courtly atmosphere, which the purest virtue can scarcely breathe with impunity. One who reads with attention that letter, celebrated as a model of truth and dignity, which

which he wrote to his pupil the dauphin after the capture of Philipsburg, will perceive, if I may so express it, the uniform of the courtier under the philosopher's mantle. " I do not," says the duke to the prince, " compliment your Royal Highness on the capture of Philipsburg; " you had a fine army, bombs, cannon, " and Vauban : neither do I praise you " for your bravery ; it is an hereditary " virtue in your house : but I felicitate " myself that you are humane, affable, " generous, liberal in displaying the services of others, and reserved in mentioning your own." When the duke de Montausier said to the son of Lewis XIV. " Bravery is an hereditary virtue in your " house," did he in earnest believe that all the Bourbons, like Henry IV. and Condé, had inherited the valour of St. Lewis? He knew better than any one that this was a mere form of adulation. Massillon may be pardoned for having said
of

of the Bourbons, in a funeral oration, “ As they ought not to be praised for being born princes, so neither ought they for being born valiant ;” but the *plain-dealer* at court should have more scruples with regard to truth than the orator. There is much more genuine greatness in the well-known adieu of the duke to the dauphin after the education of the latter was completed. “ Sir, if you are a man of worth, you will love me ; if you are not, you will hate me, and I shall console myself.” But the most striking display of his spirit was the language he ventured to hold to Lewis XIV. on account of Madame Dacier, who was criminal in the monarch’s eyes for not being a Catholic. This learned lady, when only Mademoiselle le Fevre, had dedicated a book to the king, which she could not present to him, because no one dared to introduce her to a prince who could not without indignation behold a subject bold enough

enough to be of a religion different from
 his. Montausier alone, who was himself
 a converted Protestant, braved this danger.
 He presented the lady to the king, who
 said gravely to the protector, that " he
 " did very ill in making himself the sup-
 " porter of a race under proscription ;
 " that for his part, he should forbid all
 " Huguenot writers to dedicate their
 " works to him, and would commence
 " by ordering the suppression of that of
 " Mademoiselle le Fevre."—" Sire," re-
 plied the duke, with a liberty to which
 the king was little accustomed, " is it thus
 " that you patronise merit and abilities ?
 " What signifies it to you whether the
 " author be Catholic or Protestant, pro-
 " vided the work be a good one ? Truth
 " obliges me to say, that so puerile a
 " superstition is highly unworthy of a
 " king, and little made for you." He
 added, that he should send Mademoiselle
 le Fevre a hundred pistoles in the king's
 name ;

name; and that it would depend upon his majesty whether they were repaid or not. O Montausier! what is become of you?

NOTE IX.

MOST of those who have written the history of the popes have affected to paint them under the most odious and disgusting features. They seem to have had no other purpose than to represent a set of priests, scandalous, some by their morals, others by their irreligion; all ambitious, enterprising, and engaged in a plan for subjecting the crown to the tiara. They have been charged with criminality in having abused the ignorance, credulity, and superstition of the people, in order to become supreme and formidable. Let it be allowed that their delicacy of conscience is not an object of praise; but let justice be rendered to their ability. What, too, have they done in making advantage of human folly

folly and weakness, more than any other prince would have done in their place? How many monarchs, for the support of despotism, have abused the maxim so often resounding in their ears, “ that they hold “ their authority from God alone, and are “ the earthly images of the Deity ?” A philosopher who should write the history of the popes, would present them, if not in a more favourable, at least in a more interesting and a truer light. He would paint them struggling against force and power, with the arms supplied by religion alone ; making kings and emperors tremble at this sole name ; never losing sight during six centuries of the project of becoming sovereigns of Rome, and at length succeeding : he would display them as the protectors of science, letters, the fine arts, and even of philosophy, as far as their pontifical pretensions could ally with it : he would shew twenty popes in succession
 occupied

occupied in raising the magnificent structure of St. Peter's, the finest monument of modern architecture; while so many other sovereigns take a kind of pride in neglecting, or even destroying, the erections commenced by their predecessors. What a prince was Sixtus the Fifth! what monarch in a long reign can boast of having done what this son of a peasant effected in a pontificate of five years?—The great dome of St. Peter's finished, immense obelisks raised on their base in Rome, a superb aqueduct constructed for conveying water to the capital, the library of the Vatican established, the ecclesiastical state cleared of robbers, justice rendered with equal exactness and severity, and, finally, seven millions of gold left in the treasury of the church, notwithstanding the prodigious expenditures in embellishing the capital of the Christian world! What a pity that such a man has not hitherto met with a
historian

historian worthy of him *! “ We ought
 “ to be able duly to esteem the popes,”
 says a celebrated writer, “ though we be
 “ natives of London or Geneva; and
 “ should recollect the remark of the great
 “ Cosmo de’ Medici, “ that states are not
 “ governed by pater-nosters.”

* If a more splendid panegyrist is the desideratum here meant, we may wonder that a philosopher should so far give way to vulgar admiration as to wish it for an unfeeling despot, whose love of justice was a fondness for exercising rigorous authority, and whose public munificence was the vanity of perpetuating his name at the cost of those he governed. From whose pockets came the immense sums here mentioned to be spent and hoarded?—They could not be raised but by the most distressing exactions. Of all the topics of vain praise bestowed upon sovereigns, the most inconsiderate is that of their costly works of ostentation, always dearly paid for out of the necessities or comforts of their people. **TRANSL.**

NOTE X.

AT the time when Flechier was nominated to the see of Lavaur, the court of France was at variance with the pope, who refused to grant the bishops those bulls which they thought indispensable. Flechier did not make advantage of this delay, as many others would have done, to excuse himself from residing in his diocese. He went to Lavaur, and there, till the arrival of his bulls, acted under the modest title of vicar-general of the chapter. After having some time possessed the bishopric of Nîmes, he consented that his diocese should be dismembered, in order to form out of it that of Alais in the Cevennes, that the Protestants might have more instruction and succour; for he was not only void of that ambition which aspires after great places, but of the more seducing ambition of doing good by himself, and depriving others of the honour of it.

NOTE XL.

THE Protestants, rendered furious by the Dragoonade, practised shocking cruelties against the Catholics by way of reprisals. They massacred the priests, set on fire the churches, and spread desolation all around. The affrighted pastors abandoned their flocks; and even the nuns wished to forsake their cloysters. Flechier removed the terrors of the nuns, and encouraged the pastors, at the same time excusing their fears, and compassionating their weakness. "We neither take upon us to blame, nor to justify your retreat," says he to them in a pastoral letter. He, however, assures them that the gospel precept, "when they shall persecute you in one city, flee to another," is not applicable to persons under their circumstances; and from the praises he bestows on those rectors who, in the danger, did not abandon their churches, it is evident that he

has occasion for all his episcopal charity to pardon the fugitives.

In a letter to the archbishop of Paris, Flechier thus unfolds his principles on the most efficacious means for converting the Protestants: " There are some among
 " them, who, when we have confuted
 " them, say to us, " You are in the right;
 " but it is a hard matter to quit the tra-
 " dition of our fathers." It is just to
 " *urge these a little*, in order to make them
 " reunite with the church. Many are
 " held back by mere human consider-
 " ations: on these *a fear* ought to be im-
 " pressed superior to that of human re-
 " gards; this should be the fear of God,
 " at least, *of the powers ordained by God*. . .
 " We have even met with some who *have*
 " *desired us to impose upon them some pecu-*
 " *niary fine*, not daring to declare them-
 " selves but under shelter of a slight vio-
 " lence. We should act partly by
 " persuasion and remonstrance, partly by
 " command

" command and *constraint*. I speak of a
 " constraint which should be rather a
 " correction than a chastisement, which
 " should not repel and irritate the bad,
 " or disquiet those who are, or mean to
 " become good, which should *stimulate*,
 " but not *strike* them."

This letter appears to us very curious. It shews at each line the combat of *temper* against *profession*; of the zealous priest against the indulgent sage, fearful of persecuting. But, in fine, *profession* produces its effect, as in the comedy of the "Pro-
 " cureur arbitre."

Flequier, though unwilling that violence should be used towards peaceable Protestants, thought with reason that force should be opposed to those fanatical Protestants who had taken up arms*. Cavalier, their chief, came to Nismes after

* But they were driven to this extremity by oppression and injustice. Into what a labyrinth of inconsistency are men led when they once deviate from the plain path of equity! TRANSL.

his accommodation with the marshal de Villars ; but the prelate would never see the destroyer of his flock. It was with pleasure he heard of Cavalier's departure for England. " The vessel loaded with " so many crimes," said he, " will doubt-
 " less perish." This man, originally a journeyman baker, had ordered and executed, *in the name of God*, those ravages which Flechier deplored ; as the Catholics had, *in the name of God*, practised their dragoonades. Villars was sent into the Cevennes to make war against Cavalier ; and this celebrated general, who was soon to fight and conquer prince Eugene, limited his campaign against the Protestants to a treaty of peace with the baker who commanded them. The cruel and unfortunate war that Lewis XIV. had then to sustain, compelled him to this humiliation ; and, what was little less disgraceful, the Protestants complained, not without reason, that the conditions of the treaty were ill observed.

NOTE XII.

OUR respectable prelate gave to the enemies of the church an example of that submission which he preached. Though attached by friendship to the illustrious Fenelon, he published a declaration of adherence to the bull which condemned the quietist doctrine of that virtuous archbishop; but while he proscribed his errors, he spoke of his person with all the respect due to him, and which other prelates did not grant him. He did more than render justice to Fenelon's docility; he had predicted it. Upright and pure minds understand each other; and the virtuous Fenelon did on this occasion what the virtuous Flechier would have done in his place.

He was an exact observer of the ecclesiastical laws, without straining or relaxing them. He had converted and baptised a Jew, who himself, for some unknown rea-

son, afterwards baptised a child in secret, Flechier declared the child a good Christian, notwithstanding the secrecy of the baptism. More rigid, however, with regard to marriage, he determined that the union of a Protestant man with a Catholic woman, could not be tolerated in the Romish church; and in favour of this opinion he explained as well as he was able that passage of St. Paul, which does not seem very favourable to it, "the unbelieving husband shall be sanctified by the believing wife." We know not the opinion of modern prelates and theologians on the subject; but the magistrates of our days, who pride themselves more on equity than theology, have more than once declared such marriages good and valid.

The pretended miraculous cross, against which Flechier published a pastoral letter, had been erected by a shepherd, whom the bishop caused to quit the diocese. The wood of this cross was rasped as a relic,

relic. "These particles," said he, "separated from the whole, are no more than particles of wood, which, having lost the merit of the representation of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, are worthy of no kind of honour." In the same letter he says, "Miracles ought not to be too frequent, because they would be useless; nor absolutely extinct, that the new may give credibility to the old." He speaks with much prudence on the devotion which ought to be paid to this cross; forbidding the clergy to attest the miracles, and young women to pass the night before it *.

* The affair of pretended miracles is one of the most embarrassing to the Romish clergy, who are obliged by system to admit that they still may occur, and probably will occasionally occur, and yet are ashamed to give authority to the superstitious belief of the vulgar. Those communions are much more fortunate in this point, who have thrown miracles back to a few of the first centuries of Christianity.

TRANSL.

He exhorted his canons to a life of industry and regularity, which might counteract the bad idea of chapters usually entertained by men of the world. " They consider canons," said he, " as ecclesiastics out of employ, who have nothing to do but indolently to fill an easy chair in a choir, where they hardly join their voices to those of the inferior priests who in their stead chant the praises of God. The uselessness of their lives forms a sad presumption against the regularity of their conduct."

Flechier opposed as long as he was able the establishment of an opera at Nismes. The first attempt failed, and the actors were reduced to beggary. The second company had more success. The bishop raised his voice against this spectacle, but without employing ecclesiastical censures. " You love," said he, " to see and hear these daughters of Babylon, who sing the songs of their country; and you
" chase

“chafe these serpents in proportion as they sting you.” He complained that the new converts, who, while Protestants, did not go to these spectacles, frequented them after their conversion. “Of your former laws,” said he, “you have forgotten those only which were good.” We shall not examine whether, conformably to the precepts and spirit of Christianity, an opera may not be tolerated in a great city, as a necessary evil, and a remedy against greater evils; but it must be admitted, that the moral mischief that may result from it must be more sensible and more to be feared in a small city, and might with some reason alarm episcopal solicitude,

NOTE XIII.

FLECHIER's family assert that this anecdote, and the circumstance of his father's being a dealer in candles, are not correct. According to them, his father had inherited

herited from his ancestors a little estate, which he cultivated himself, occupying also a mill upon it. The haughty prelate who so basely reproached Flechier with the indigence of his progenitors, said once to him, "Confess that your father would have been much surprised to see you step out of his mill, and become a bishop."—"I much fear," replied Flechier, "that if yours had been a miller, you would have turned the mill-stone all your life."

This answer calls to mind what was said by another prelate to a distributor of ecclesiastical favours, who consulted him whether a preacher of distinguished talents, but of low birth, could, without *indecenty*, be raised to the episcopacy. "Did I think that could be made a question of," replied the prelate, I would at this instant throw my mitre and crozier out of window."

EULOGY

OF

LA MOTTE.

ANTHONY HOUDART DE LA MOTTE was born at Paris on January 17th, 1672. He commenced his studies in a seminary of Jesuits, an order of men who have deserved so well of letters by their abilities and writings; happy if they had been contented with such a praise! La Motte always preserved his relations, either of gratitude or policy, with this society; for the Jesuits were then formidable, and the thunderbolt which they so long defied yet slept.

After his preparatory education, he, like many other celebrated men, entered upon

the study of law; and, like them, was soon disgusted with it *. Whatever might be his esteem for so noble and useful a profession, letters, by presenting to him objects better suited to his talents, offered a still more flattering recompence. The writer who, refusing to confine his genius and fame within the circle of the courts, is able to interest all ages and nations in his works, obtains esteem and celebrity wherever there exist men worthy of being his readers. Such was the brilliant prospect which dazzled the young la Motte on his first desertion of the bar. But his rising enthusiasm had suffered him to behold the laurels only which seemed to await him. Experience alone was to inform him of the rocks which were to beset his course; and this experience was speedy and severe. His first attempt, a comedy, miscarried; and this was at the Italian theatre, which being then only for the re-

* See NOTE I.

presentation of farce, did not leave the unfortunate author the consolation of supposing that the spectators had been difficult *. His disgrace could not be more mortifying: it so affected him, that for some months it caused him to renounce the theatre, letters, and even mankind. He threw himself into la Trappe, and believed himself a penitent because he was humiliated. This vocation, however, was only the bitter and abortive fruit of disappointed self-love; it therefore only lasted the time necessary to tranquillize him, and restore his strength and spirits. This monk, so little calculated for the profession, was soon thrown back from his temporary cloyster upon the world; and proved, as soon as he had again plunged into it, to what a degree his religious fervour was cooled. He wrote the charming opera of "l'Europe Galante." Campa, who had hi-

fastidious

* See NOTE II.

ther to

therto only set masses and motets for the cathedral of Paris, deserting, like la Motte, the sacred for the profane, composed the music for this opera ; and was so intoxicated with its success, that the church was obliged, not without regret, to abandon him also to the theatre *.

La Motte soon afterwards, in partnership with Destouches, gave to the public the " Pastoral of Issé," which was not less applauded than " l'Europe Galante." This pastoral was at first written in three acts, but he was advised to make them five, in order to raise it to the dignity of the *grand opera* ; nothing however was gained by this, and the author would have done better to have abridged his work, by suppressing the feeble and unmeaning episode of Pan and Doris, which makes the principal action languish, and the absence of which would restore to the piece

* See NOTE III.

all that interest which the *grand opera* had so generously resigned.

He afterwards, in conjunction with different musicians, composed several other operas, most of which succeeded. Some, however, were less fortunate; but from a cause contrary to that which has proved fatal to many other works of the kind: the failure of those of la Motte was rather the fault of the music than of the words; for they who have most positively denied our author a genius for poetry in general, have granted him a talent for lyric poetry, either from motives of equity, or because they thought it was granting him little. The donation, however, was more flattering than they imagined. Despréaux and Racine, while they affected to despise this excellence, had in vain attempted to arrive at it. The harmony which enchants us in their verses was, if the expression may be allowed, too strong and too well nourished to be capable of being transferred to works
meant

meant to be sung. Verses of this kind require only a degree of harmony which may admit of their union with musical melody, without giving harshness to the compound, and without loading it so as to weaken the expression by exaggerating it. Lyric poetry therefore requires a certain luxurious softness in the ideas, the images, the expressions, the measure and cadence of the verses, and their rhythm and combination; it even requires such a happy arrangement of long and short syllables as may render it unnecessary for the tune to proceed with too quick or too slow a motion. Hence the talent for lyric poetry, notwithstanding its great inferiority to a genius for the higher kinds of poetry, is not much more frequent, because it is compounded of several qualities of the second rank, which seldom meet in a poet, in such a just degree as to produce verses proper for song without being too sonorous, and easy without being

being negligent *. La Motte had the advantage of uniting these qualities. He merited the still greater praise of having been the creator of three species of operatical drama; that of the ballet in the "Europe Galante" (for the ballets of Quinault are beneath mediocrity); of the pastoral, in "Iffé," which breathes the soft and quiet sensibility proper to this composition; and that of the comedy-ballet, in "le Carnaval et la Folie."

In the midst of these accumulated triumphs, la Motte was ambitious of a new one. He published a volume of odes, which at first met with many panegyrists, and some critics; and which, soon after,

* It will appear that *lyric poetry* is here understood in its original and proper sense of "verba socianda chordis," verse to be associated with music. By extending its meaning to *odes* intended only to be read, we have raised its signification in English, so as to include what we reckon the highest species of pure poetry. **TRANSL.**

had many critics, and some apologists. They were full of wit and good sense; but good sense, and even wit, are inferior decorations in ode-writing. In la Motte's odes the images are scanty, the colouring feeble, and the harmony often neglected. The author, sufficiently conscious of his deficiencies, even had criticism spared the officious pains of putting him in mind of them, said, in justification of the harshness imputed to his verses, "A poet is not a flute." This pleasantry, if it deserves the name, did not give his odes what the ear and the imagination required. In consequence, they were soon effaced by those of the celebrated Rousseau, who, with less wit, perhaps, than la Motte, had much superior qualifications for the higher poetry;—the art of representing truths by images, a nice and sensible ear, and, above all, that happy selection of words, so essential to verse, and especially to the ode, the loftiness of which rejects what is common in expression, still more than in idea.

When

When the two rivals, however, were competitors for a seat in the Academy, la Motte was almost unanimously preferred to Rousseau *, for a reason highly important to a literary society,—that he had gained friends, whereas Rousseau did not possess a single one. The harsh and haughty character of this poet was repulsive to all his literary brethren; and the superiority of his talents did not tend to conciliate them. But though it was allowable not to love him, it was not so to refuse him justice †.

Satiated with garlands on the lyric scene, la Motte ventured to appear on a theatre still more worthy of a poet's ambition, but more formidable and tempestuous. He gave the French comedians the tragedy of "the Maccabees." But, as he had already a considerable reputation, and consequently many enemies ready to hiss the

* See NOTE IV.

† See NOTE V.

piece before they should hear it, and to revile it after it had proved successful, he prudently kept his name concealed. Envy, thus blinded and thrown off her guard, first joined in applause with the crowd of spectators ; and perhaps even led the way, in the hope of opposing nascent and unknown genius to that which was already in possession of the public esteem. The most determined enemies of la Motte, far from suspecting the innocent snare he laid for them, found the tragedy so well written, that they conceived it to be a posthumous work of Racine. The author for some weeks enjoyed in secret the exquisite judgment of these great connoisseurs. When he saw himself sure of success, he caused an obscure rumour to be spread by some friends, that he was the author of " the Maccabees ;" and he had the satisfaction of hearing those turned into ridicule who attributed the piece to him, and had not the sagacity to feel " how far he

" was

" was incapable of it." At length he declared himself openly, and enjoyed the new pleasure of seeing his enemies change their language. The more thoughtless among them shamelessly reviled what they had praised; the more subtle kept silence; the more moderate, as a great effort of justice, acknowledged that the work had in fact some merit, though much inferior to what had been given out. This was near the truth; for though the tragedy of the Maccabees is estimable in some of its details, the languor of its versification, so ridiculously compared to that of Racine, the feebleness of its plot, of most of its characters, and especially of its last acts, have so damped the applauses it received on its first representation, that it has almost entirely disappeared from the stage*.

Encouraged by the success of this piece, la Motte soon afterwards produced the tragedy of "Romulus." He was now

* See NOTE VI.

grown bolder, and ventured to expose himself openly to the attacks of envy. "Romulus" had still more success, or at least was oftener represented, than the "Maccabees *." If its repetitions have been less fortunate, and it is now almost forgotten, the cause is to be imputed to Voltaire's "Brutus," which, with a subject nearly similar in kind, has much more strength, grandeur, and effect, and especially that magic of style which charms alike the spectator and the reader.

The fortune of "Ines de Castro" was still more brilliant than that of the two preceding pieces; and it has likewise proved more constant and durable, for it has supported itself to our times. This tragedy, one of the most interesting on the stage, received an eulogy that few pieces will share with it; this was, that all who saw it while yet new, could not be contented with a single representation; a na-

* See NOTE VII.

tural effect of so pathetic a performance, in which what the ancients called *tragic pity* is carried to its height, without any mixture of horror to render the emotion painful. In "Ines," the spectator's soul is deeply touched with sorrow, but of a kind which leaves an impression equally strong and sweet: the feelings are never assailed with that violence which causes averted eyes, and checks or dries up the tears. This piece, however, as well as all the author's other tragedies, has been criticised for the feebleness of its style and colouring; but this defect is almost obliterated by many true, simple, and penetrating expressions of sentiment; by the care the author has always taken to make his actors speak, if not the language of eloquence, at least that of their situation; and by his art of attaching the spectator to the situation itself, without giving him time to become difficult as to the manner in which the details are represented. Suf-

ficiently prepared by the poet to supply from his own sources all defects in the force of impression, it is enough for him to feel himself gently moved to compassion and tears, and his own heart does the rest *.

It may readily be imagined that the great success of "Ines" produced criticisms without number. Discontented writers are always at hand to prove to an applauded author, that he had no right to his success. But what would seem strange to one unacquainted with all the mysteries and resources of human malignity, the same spectators who had shed copious tears at la Motte's tragedy, did not reject the satisfaction of giving ear to the satires made upon it. They amused themselves with these pieces for the moment, as they laugh at *Pourceaugnac*, after having wept at *Phædra*. For the public, eager to enjoy the pleasure they seek at the theatre, and

* See NOTE VIII.

sometimes

sometimes hurried along at the first instant by this pleasure, are always ready, when become cool, to quarrel with themselves for the enthusiasm they were so simple as to feel; and are obliged to the censor who asks them, like the *Misanthrope*,

And have you then the face to call that fine?

Their vanity is not hurt by being reproached with having fallen into a mistake, because this mistake consisted in supposing a superiority of talents, which they are better pleased to deny than to applaud; and they are internally thankful to that satire which thus as it were restores them what they had paid. The satires on "Ines," it is true, presently underwent the just fate of writings of this kind; they plunged each other into oblivion, suffering the piece to survive, slightly injured by their strokes. The French, says excellently the abbé Dubos, do not despise all which they ridicule. The traducers of
this

this play performed a function like that of those Roman soldiers, who, following the triumphal car of their general, sang satirical verses against him, which the populace were delighted to hear, even while they cried "Long live the conqueror!" La Motte was one day in a coffee-house, in the midst of a swarm of literary drones, who were abusing his work without knowing the author. He patiently heard them a long time in silence, and then called out to a friend who accompanied him, "Let us go and yawn at the fiftieth representation of this unfortunate piece." At another time, when told of the numerous criticisms made on his tragedy, "It is true," said he, "it has been much criticised, but with tears."

To shorten the list of our academicians' successes, we shall not speak of some comedies, which were also very well received; among others, the "Magnifique," which, played in a superior manner

manner by Dufresne when it first appeared, still pleases by the ingenuity of its details, and the charms of its style *. Notwithstanding the severity of criticism which la Motte has undergone, we are obliged in his eulogy to pass over some particulars, which we should carefully collect, and perhaps make the most of, in that of some others.

Dramatic authors, whose career is a continued warfare, cannot, more than generals, expect to experience a fortune without reverse. La Motte, three years after "Ines," brought upon the stage the tragedy of "Oedipus," which reached no more than the fourth or fifth representation. After having written it in verse, he put it into prose; and this gave occasion to the publication of his system of prose tragedies, so ingeniously supported, and so warmly refuted. His principal arguments were, that tragedies in prose ap-

* See NOTE IX.

proached infinitely nearer than those in verse to the simplicity and truth of nature ; that a tragic writer, delivered from the constraint of versification, would be obliged, in order to compensate the spectator for the loss of poetry, to give more action and life to his pieces ; that not one of those languid scenes would be permitted, which are endured from the sole fear of discouraging dramatic authors, were it expected of them to be incessantly both poetical and interesting ; that verse had formerly been asserted to be as essential to comedy as to tragedy, till Moliere, by composing some of his master-pieces in prose, had compelled the public to renounce a prejudice so injurious to their pleasure ; that the same would happen to tragedy were any good writer to hazard the experiment ; in fine, that the law imposed on tragedians of writing in verse, may divert from this walk men of rare genius, who, having received from nature superior

superior talents for the more essential parts of tragedy, may be deficient in that of versification. It was replied to la Motte, that tragedy ought not to be an exact representation of nature; that such a representation would often excite horror and disgust, rather than sympathy; that the pleasure of the spectator, in great measure, even consists in the perception that he is present at a representation, and not at the thing itself; that there is much less inconvenience in approaching nearer to nature in comedy, because there is no reason to fear, as in tragedy, a painful sensation resulting from too close a representation of the scene; that the charm of versification is a mean of undeceiving the spectator, were he tempted to take the action for reality, and of tempering his emotions so as to render them no more than agreeable; that, moreover, the harmony of verse is a pleasure expected by the spectator of a tragedy, of which he ought
not

not to be disappointed ; that the licence of writing in prose would not render tragedies more interesting, but would only contribute to multiply bad or indifferent performances ; and that, instead of gaining by it some good works, the theatre would only be inundated with a deluge of worthless abortions.

Such were the arguments adduced on each side ; the result of which was, that almost all men of letters have decided in favour of verse, though so many versifiers, who seemed by their productions so well calculated for prose, appear interested in its behalf *. La Motte, holding in one hand

* Though it appears to me that the cause has been justly decided in favour of writing tragedy in verse, yet I cannot lay any stress on the argument for its use, that it takes off from the *reality* of the representation, and guards the spectator against the too strong emotions which would attend a temporary illusion : for when every attempt is made by scenery, action, and other concomitants, to foster such an illusion,

hand his ingenious dissertations against tragedies in verse, and having in the other

lusion, and the excellence of a tragedy is estimated by the force of the emotions it excites, it would be strange indeed were the language purposely designed to counteract all these intentions. The proposition, "that tragedy ought not to be an exact representation of nature," may be admitted on another principle, that of the love of novelty or improvement. We want, in a representation for pleasure, nature heightened, adorned, elevated, as well in sentiment as in diction; and to this elevation and variety verse greatly contributes. It is, besides, an *additional* gratification, which, if compatible with the general intention of tragedy, ought to be provided. It is to be observed, however, that the rhimed verse of French tragedy, pronounced in a manner which clearly marks out the measure, must be much more essential to the ear which expects it, than English blank verse, pronounced, according to the modern rule, merely as prose. Dramatic poetry, among the French, stands much higher, *as poetry*, than among us. We should not think of looking in any of our tragedians for that perfection of style and versification which they instance in Racine. TRANSL.

only

only his unfortunate "Oedipus in prose" for an example, had the fate of those advocates who, after their artful pleadings in a litigious business, lose their cause through the weakness of the evidence they produce. The question, thus decided by fact, seems to be so without an appeal; and our academician's bad success in establishing his new species, has brought on a proscription of it, which has been regarded by his successors as a perpetual interdict.

If la Motte failed to convince by his assertions in favour of tragedies in prose, he failed still more in his attacks on those in verse. The predominant vice of the new heresy on this subject is, that of thinking that the beauty of the thoughts dispensed from that of the harmony; as if it were asserted to be indifferent whether a piece of music were executed on an instrument in or out of tune, or whether, in singing, the measure were neglected or scrupulously observed. La Motte seems to have

have wished to appreciate poetry as the geometrician measures bodies, by stripping them of all sensible qualities ; but the geometrician in so doing follows his principles, whereas the poet who imitates him acts contrary to his. Thus the sophisms of this bold innovator, like those of a deaf man who should deny the sense of hearing, have given neither good nor bad poets a distaste for versification.

La Motte was still less successful in his " Iliad " than in his anti-poetical paradoxes. He wrote, as is well known, against Homer ; but by this he offered him a less injury than by translating him into French verse. He had attacked the subject, the disposition, and the entire plan of the Iliad, with much ingenuity, and in many points with much reason and taste ; but he did not render sufficient justice to those sublime beauties which will secure admiration to this poem in every age ; still less was he able to transfer these beau-

ties to his version. He substituted a bare skeleton to the monster he meant to combat; and as he had raised the public laughter against his adversaries, he exposed himself to their shafts by an unskilful travesty of the object of their worship. The powerful diversion he afforded them by this mistake lost him almost all his advantages; and the French Iliad consoled Madame Dacier for the ridicule which had been thrown upon her by the answer of la Motte to her criticisms. This delightful answer, full of wit and elegance, presented throughout a striking contrast to the puerile reasonings, the pedantic enthusiasm, and the gross invectives of this learned lady, who employed only erudition and animosity in her attack, which he repelled only by argument and pleasantry. "Alcibiades," said Madame Dacier, "gave a great box on the ear to a teacher of rhetoric who was without the works of Homer; what would he now do to one
 " who

“ who should read to him the Iliad of
 “ M. de la Motte?”—“ It is lucky for
 “ me,” replied the calm philosopher,
 “ that Madame Dacier did not recollect
 “ this piece of history, when I recited to
 “ her one of the cantos of my Iliad.”

He compared the railings with which she
 overwhelmed him to “ those charming
 “ Greek particles which signify nothing,
 “ but which, notwithstanding, are said to
 “ strengthen and adorn the lines of Ho-
 “ mer.” He added, “ that her invectives
 “ had all the simplicity of the heroic
 “ times, and all the energy of those which
 “ the heroes of the Iliad lavish upon each
 “ other.” Hence it was said, that Ma-
 dame Dacier treated her adversary *à la*
Grecque, while he treated her *à la Fran-*
çoise.

La Motte’s “ Fables,” which appeared
 some years after his Iliad, were not less
 criticised. They have been praised for the
 invention of subjects, and the justness, and

frequently the ingenuity, of the morality. It has been asserted, that even la Fontaine had less of this merit than la Motte. But the great, the genuine merit of a fable, is the art of narration, and here la Fontaine is inimitable. In his fables, the beauties seem to have escaped him without design, and almost without consciousness; in those of la Motte, the beauties (for why should we deny that such there are, and of more than one kind?) have always a studied air, indicating pains and research. The difference between the two writers may be judged of even from their faults; according to the observation of a geometrician, (M. de Mairan,) who sometimes, notwithstanding the anathema launched by so many poets against geometry, took the liberty of reasoning with truth and delicacy on works of taste. "All the faults of la Fontaine," he remarked, "are those of negligence; all those of la Motte, of affectation." Many ingenious

nious men, however, have made mistakes between them. An illustrious writer drew into this snare all the society of the Temple, by reciting a fable as la Fontaine's, which they received with rapture. "Gentlemen," said he, as soon as their plaudits had subsided, "the fable is la Motte's." Notwithstanding the faults of this writer, if we cast our eyes upon the multitude of fables printed within forty years past by authors who wished to slide between la Fontaine and him, (for they have all been too modest to dispute the precedence with la Fontaine,) we may be permitted to ask, without detracting from their merits, which of them has displaced la Motte? Let us add, however, that most of these writers have left la Motte far behind them, not in their fables, but, what is an easier task, in their prefaces; without reckoning the irrefragable decision of a cloud of journalists in their favour.

A rule, equally sure and easy, will teach us to appreciate the poetical merit of la Motte. To know whether verses are good, it suffices to ask if we are desirous of retaining them in the memory ; and woe to those which cannot support the affirmative of this question ! Of our academicians, many opera-passages are got by heart, even without singing them ; several of his fables are quoted with applause, many of their verses are repeated, and some have even become proverbial, Such are,

Il vaut mieux plaire que servir,
To please is better than to serve ;

L'ennui naquit un jour de l'uniformité,
Ennui's the child of uniformity ;

La haine veille et l'amitié s'endort,
Hatred wakes while friendship sleeps ;

and several more which might be added,
Some stanzas are even repeated from his
odes,

odes, a species of poetry in which, without Rousseau, we should have so little to quote, and so much to forget. We may then conclude, that if la Motte is not a great poet, he is one whose verses are remembered; but who can recite a single one of so many rhimers who vilify him?

He has been censured for his paradoxes on poetry, on tragedies in prose, on the ode, on fable, on epic poetry. That he should hold these paradoxes was, however, natural. He wished to make verses, and felt that nature had not made him a poet; he wished to compose odes, and felt that he had more good sense than warmth, more reason than enthusiasm; he wished to write tragedies, and saw himself at an immense distance from Corneille and Racine; he wished to produce fables, and felt that his genius, the character of which was artful refinement, would in vain aim at the charming simplicity of la Fontaine. What then remained for him to do?—

To maintain with all the skill he possessed, that harmony and imagery were not necessary to poetry, warmth and enthusiasm to the ode, versification to tragedy, and simplicity to fable. La Motte made himself an " Art of Poetry " suited to his own talents, as so many people make themselves a system of morality according to their interests. Let us not adopt his opinions, but let us pardon him for having maintained them. There are few writers who have not, like him, attempted to lower the species of excellence which nature has denied them. An author deficient in correctness, and too indolent to polish his productions, will pass encomiums on negligence of style, and decorate with the name of ease a loose disjointed versification. One who thinks superficially will place all merit in diction; one who writes, or believes he writes, with *warmth*, (an expression so much abused in our time,) will give this real or affected warmth the preference

preference over reason and truth. The public will permit the self-love of each writer to plead its cause, will laugh at their efforts, not of genius, but of argumentation, to obtain a higher rank, and will conclude with putting each in his proper place.

If the verses of la Motte are not master-pieces of poetry, his prose-writings may be regarded as models of style *. His academical discourses, in particular, gained the highest applauses. For these they were indebted not only to their real merit, but to another of the author's talents, which it would be unjust to pass over in silence. No one read, or rather recited, (for he was blind,) in a more seductive and fascinating manner: gliding rapidly and with a low voice over the feeble passages; dwelling with intelligence, though without affectation, upon the happier parts; finally, giving to his recitation that kind

* See NOTE X.

of delicate punctuation, which renders sensible excellencies of different species by nice and varied inflexions, and avoiding with the greatest care that emphatical manner, which disgusts the hearer by attempting to command his acquiescence, and misses its effect by endeavouring to augment it.

Such was the versatility of la Motte's genius, that he was even a theologian when he chose. He wrote charges for bishops; and though the secret was kept by both parties, his touch and manner betrayed him *. He was also the author of several other writings, which his enemies would have treated with severity had they known the real father, but for which the supposed father received their profound homage. On this occasion he used to relate, that one of those miserable writers who make a traffic of eulogy and satire, had the unlucky equity to bestow great praises on a

* See NOTE XI.

piece which he did not suppose to be la Motte's; and when he was apprized of his mistake, he could not help exclaiming, with all the honesty of meanness, "O that I had known it sooner!"

Satire, of which our academician was so often the object, was almost the only kind of composition in which he did not exercise himself; the mildness and honour of his character constantly forbid him this odious resource of jealous mediocrity. He was fully capable, however, of employing it to advantage. By his witty reply to a very injurious criticism on his "Ballet des Arts," it appears that he might, if he pleased, have practised with success in this easy and contemptible department of letters. His critic was le Noble, a man who, decried in literature for his detestable rhapsodies, and branded by justice in a criminal accusation, might have found so many reasons for keeping in the shade, if experience did not prove that impudence is the wretched

wretched asylum of those writers who have the best cause to be silent. La Motte, by inflicting on him a merited punishment, and taking vengeance this single time in his whole life, imitated the good-natured la Fontaine, who, in like manner, only once became severe to avenge himself on Lully. He was even more moderate than la Fontaine, whose momentary rage, like that of a child which discharges itself upon every thing in his way, involved in the quarrel the worthy and peaceable Quinault, who had not injured him. La Motte's shafts, directed by a more prudent hand, pierced only the wretch who had the folly and baseness to injure him. His other adversaries might then be convinced, that if he had spared them, it was not through impotence : but content with this sole trial of his strength in satire, he took the better part of afterwards abstaining from it. He even resisted almost entirely the natural propensity of repelling criticism.

cism. The poet Gacon provoked his patience by wretched epigrams, with the vain hope of forcing him to a reply. Wearied at length with shedding his gall to no purpose, " You shall gain nothing by it," said he, " for I shall publish a pamphlet " under the title, " Answer to the silence " of M. de la Motte." A more mortifying reply to a satire will perhaps never be made, than that of Fontenelle to an author who, having occasion for his services, came humbly to apologise for having insulted him in a pamphlet: " Sir," said the philosopher, " you give me the first intelligence of it." This answer calls to mind another made by Fontenelle to la Motte. The latter, still young, and knowing little of men, especially of writers, told the philosopher, that he thought all the men of letters were his friends. " Were that the case," replied Fontenelle, " it would be " a terrible symptom against you: but
" you

“ you do them too much honour, and
 “ yourself too little.”

If, however, the reputation he enjoyed caused many to be jealous of him, the sweetness of his temper gained him many partisans. No one more sincerely than he applauded the success even of his rivals; no one encouraged rising talents with more zeal and interest; no one praised good works with more genuine satisfaction: if he pointed out faults in them, it was not to enjoy the easy glory of mortifying another's vanity; it was with the feeling to which critics are strangers, and which common readers rarely entertain, that of being really concerned to find a blot. It was therefore said of him, that *justice and justness* was his motto. Of both these qualities he exhibited a distinguished proof when he gave, as censor, his approbation to Voltaire's first tragedy; for he did not hesitate to add to it, “ that this work gave
 “ promise

" promise of a worthy successor on the
 " theatre to Corneille and Racine." He
 did not live long enough to know the full
 truth of his prediction ; but this adds to
 the credit of his judgment and his heart
 for having made it.

Others were far from observing towards
 him the attentions he practised ; but, in-
 stead of complaining of their harshness, he
 was wise enough to profit by it. " When
 " an author," says he, in one of his pre-
 faces, " is thankful to his friends for in-
 " forming him of his faults, the truth he
 " seeks does not escape him. The more
 " mortifying it is, the more pleasure people
 " take in acquainting him with it, pro-
 " vided they have no consequences to fear.
 " Hence, every body, either through
 " friendship or the pretext of friendship,
 " is in the habit of putting my self-love to
 " the severest trials : all are Madame
 " Daciers to me. This is the help I have
 " procured towards enabling me to write
 " better."

“better.” This unalterable mildness was all he opposed, not only to literary insults, but to personal affronts. A young man, upon whose foot he once happened to tread in a crowd, gave him a blow on the face. “Sir,” said la Motte to him, “you will be very sorry for what you have done: I am blind.” With the same patience he endured the painful infirmities under which he laboured, and which terminated his life on December 26, 1731, in the midst of the faithful discharge of his duties, and while he welcomed death as the happy period of his sufferings*.

While la Motte’s pretended friends let him taste with some bitterness the rigour of their zeal for the perfecting of his works, he had also some true and respectable friends, who, to their interest for his glory, joined those regards which he deserved, but did not claim. The friendly bond which attached him and Fontenelle

* See NOTE XII.

is especially worthy of being made a model by men of letters ; it never slackened, and is their reciprocal eulogy. Fontenelle has even several times said, that the fairest feature of his life was never having been jealous of la Motte. They mutually enlightened and guided each other, both in their works and in their conduct ; and it was by the advice of la Motte, that Fontenelle had both the courage and prudence to decline answering a Jesuit, (Fr. Baltus,) who had bitterly censured his " History of " Oracles." This critic, a profound reasoner, had asserted that the author of the history had done an injury to Christianity, by demonstrating that the predictions of Paganism were impostures. Fontenelle, though strongly tempted to beat down his adversary, by the facility of the task, was restrained by the prudent remonstrance of la Motte, who shewed him the danger of alienating by his answer a society

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which might be called *legion* when an attack was made on the meanest of its members. In consequence of this friendly admonition, Fontenelle contented himself with writing a letter to a journalist who urged him to reply, in which he makes an answer of three lines to his antagonist, the spirit of which would suffer by dilution. " I shall leave my censurer to enjoy his triumph in peace: I consent to regard the devil as a prophet, since the Jesuit will have it so, and he thinks it the orthodox faith *."

Agree-

* Fontenelle had probably another motive for his silence. It is well known that his agreeable and lively " History of Oracles " is indebted for all its argumentative matter to the elaborate work of Van Dale on the same subject. Father Baltus was a man perhaps of equal learning with this Dutchman; and his reply to Fontenelle was of a kind which that ingenious writer might not find himself able to refute, at least without more study than he chose to bestow

Agreement in temper, in cast of genius, and in principles, had formed that solid union between our two academicians which does so much honour to their memory. Perhaps it may be interesting to examine in what these two writers, so similar in various respects, differed in others. Both of them, replenished with judgment, knowledge, and good sense, constantly display a superiority to prejudices, as well philosophical as literary; both attack them with that modest timidity under which the wise man will always shield himself when combating received opinions; a timidity which their enemies termed hypocritical gentleness, because hatred gives to prudence the name of cunning, and to art

on the subject. It was, however, taken in hand by a more adequate controversialist, le Clerc; and Baltus published a rejoinder. The dispute will probably at this time be committed to the decision of good sense, rather than of erudition. TRANSL.

that of falsehood. Both of them have carried too far their decided, though apparently moderate revolt from the gods and laws of Parnassus; but la Motte's free opinions seem more closely connected with his personal interest in supporting them; and Fontenelle's, with the general interest he took in the progress of reason in all departments. In the writings of both are to be found that method which is so satisfactory to correct minds, and that artful ingenuity which gives so much delight to delicate judges; but this last quality in la Motte is more developed; in Fontenelle it leaves more to be guessed by the reader. La Motte, without ever saying too much, forgets nothing that his subject offers, dexterously makes use of the whole, and seems to fear that he should lose some of his advantages by too subtle a concealment of his meaning: Fontenelle, without ever being obscure, except to those who do not deserve that an author should be clear,
gives

gives himself at the same time the pleasure of reservation, and that of hoping to be thoroughly understood by readers worthy of understanding him. Both, too little sensible to the charms of poetry and the magic of versification, have sometimes become poets by the force of ability ; but la Motte somewhat more frequently than Fontenelle, though he has often the double defect of weakness and harshness, while Fontenelle has only that of weakness : but the latter is almost always lifeless in his verses ; whereas la Motte sometimes infuses soul and interest into his. Both were crowned with distinction at the lyric theatre ; but Fontenelle was unfortunate on the French theatre, because he was absolutely destitute of that sensibility which is indispensable to a tragic poet, and of which nature had bestowed some sparks on la Motte. One may be certain, for instance, that Fontenelle would never have been the author of that sublime stroke in “ Ines de

“Castro,” where, on finding herself poisoned, and perceiving the approach of death, she cries, “Remove my children *.” Neither, probably, would he have written that charming passage in one of la Motte’s fables, where, speaking of two amorous birds, he paints their mutual passion by this sweet and just stroke of sentiment ;

Parmi tous les oiseaux du monde
Ils se choïssoient tous les jours.

From all the birds on ev’ry spray
They chose each other day by day.

Fontenelle and la Motte have both written in prose with great clearness, elegance, and even simplicity ; but la Motte with a more natural, Fontenelle with a more

* That this natural, but apparently obvious thought, should obtain the title of *sublime* from the eulogist, is a curious example either of the different use of words, or of a different mode of feeling, in the French nation, from those of their neighbours.

TRANSL.
studied

studied simplicity ; for this quality may be studied, and then it becomes manner, and ceases to be a model. What renders Fontenelle a mannerist in his simplicity is, that in order to present refined, or even grand ideas, under a more simple form, he sometimes falls into the dangerous path of familiarity, which contrasts with and trenches upon the delicacy or grandeur of the thought ; an incongruity the more sensible, as he seems to affect it : whereas the familiarity of la Motte (for he, too, sometimes descends to it) is more sober and measured, more suited to its subject, and on a level with the things treated of. Fontenelle was superior in extent of knowledge, with which he has had the art to adorn his writings, and which renders his philosophy more worthy of being recollected and quoted ; but la Motte has made his reader sensible that, in order to be equal in wealth and value to his friend, he only wanted, as Fontenelle himself said, “ eyes and

“ study.” Both received from nature a flexibility of talent which fitted them for various kinds of writing ; but they had the imprudence, or secret vanity, to try their powers in too many. Thus they weakened their reputation by attempting to extend it too far ; but Fontenelle has solidly established his glory by his immortal “ History of the Academy of Sciences,” and especially by those interesting eulogies, full of refined and profound sense, which inspire the noblest emulation in rising genius, and will transmit to posterity the name of the author with that of the celebrated society whose worthy organ he was, and of the great men whose equal he rendered himself in becoming their panegyrist.

Fontenelle and la Motte, in fine, are both dangerous writers to young authors ; the latter by his paradoxes, the former by the seducing faults of his style ; but both deserve a distinguished place among philosophical

lophical writers, from the constantly ingenious, and sometimes useful views, they have taken of various literary objects. They have been, with respect to good taste, what Descartes was with respect to philosophy : like him, they erred in several material points ; but, like him, they have taught us to be no longer the dupes of authority, and to shake off the yoke of that pusillanimous superstition, almost as common in letters as in religion, and by so much the more humiliating to human reason, as religious superstition seldom attacks any but weak minds, whereas literary superstition has frequently seduced men of enlightened understandings.

To conclude the parallel of these two celebrated men, it will not be useless, after having displayed them in their works, or in the society of those of their own class, to paint them as they were in common society, and especially amid those two classes of it which demand the greatest cautions
in

in order to avoid giving offence,—the sometimes formidable class of the great, and the always troublesome class of fools, so copiously diffused among all the others. Fontenelle and la Motte, always reserved, consequently always dignified, with the great, always on their guard before them without shewing it, never displaying more wit than was necessary to please them, without shocking their self-consequence, “ saved themselves,” according to Montagne’s expression, “ from undergoing *effectual tyranny* from them, by their care in not “ making them undergo *talking tyranny*.” Sometimes, however, in this society, as in their style, they gave way to a kind of familiarity ; but with this difference, that la Motte’s familiarity was more respectful and reserved ; Fontenelle’s more easy and free, yet always so circumspect as not to tempt any one to abuse it. Their conduct with fools was still more studied and cautious, as they too well knew that this kind
of

of men, internally and deeply jealous of the splendor of those talents by which they are humiliated, never pardon persons of superior understanding, but in proportion to the indulgence they experience from them, and the care taken to conceal this indulgence. Fontenelle and la Motte, when in companies not made for them, never gave way to absence or disdain; they allowed the freest scope to folly of every kind, without suffering it to fear a check, or even to suspect that it was observed. But Fontenelle, never forward to talk, even among his equals, was contented with listening to those who were not worthy to hear him, and only studied to shew them a semblance of approbation, which might prevent them from taking his silence for contempt or weariness; la Motte, more complaisant, or even more philosophical, recollecting the Spanish proverb, "that there is no fool from whom a wise man may not learn something,"

took

took pains to discover, in persons the most void of parts, the favourable side, either for his own instruction, or the consolation of their vanity. He put them upon topics with which they were the best acquainted, and thus, without affectation, procured them the pleasure of an outward display of all the little they possessed; whence he derived the double advantage, of not being wearied in their company, and of rendering them happy beyond their hopes. If they were satisfied with Fontenelle, they were enchanted with la Motte. May this example of philosophical charity serve as a lesson to those stern and untractable men of wit, whose intolerant pride is not satisfied without treating fools with humiliating disdain; while this unfeeling mode of teaching them what they are, still leaves them understanding enough to seek and to discover the means of revenge.

NOTES

TO THE

EULOGY OF LA MOTTE.

NOTE I.

“ONE of the circumstances,” said la Motte, “among many others, which disgusted me with the bar, was an answer which a celebrated lawyer one day in my presence made to the first president Lamoignon. This magistrate having asked him why he so often undertook detestable causes?—“Because,” he replied, “I have lost too many good ones, and gained too many bad.”

NOTE II.

HE produced this piece at the age of twenty-one. Its title was "Les Originaux ou l'Italien." It was written half in Italian and half in French, and had three acts, with a prologue and an interlude.

NOTE III.

IT is said of this artist, that being still music-master of the cathedral of Paris while he was composing this opera, he once fell asleep during vespers, and dreamt of the "Europe Galante;" when the sub-chanter coming, according to custom, to inform him of the first verse of the anthem, he awaked suddenly, and began singing the air of the fourth act of the opera, " Vivir, vivre, gran sultana."

NOTE IV.

LA MOTTE was admitted in the place of Thomas Corneille, on Feb. 8, 1710. His discourse at reception is still quoted as a model of its kind. The general difficulty attending these compositions is the necessity of making common-place acknowledgments and compliments, which was then more burthenfome than at present, since these were almost the only topics. It was fortunate, therefore, when they could be covered and varied by some circumstance personal to the speaker. La Motte had this advantage, though he was much to be pitied for it. He was blind, as Thomas Corneille had been. With great ingenuity he made use of this calamity to interest his auditors, and to return thanks, equally new and delicate, to his associates. After having with much equity and justness appreciated the merit of his predecessor, he proceeded; " You have
" beheld

“ beheld him faithful to your duties till
 “ extreme old age, infirm as he was, and
 “ already deprived of sight.—The mention
 “ of this circumstance makes me feel the
 “ condition to which I am myself reduced.
 “ What age ravished from my predecessor,
 “ I have lost from my youth.—I must,
 “ however, confess, that this privation of
 “ which I complain, will no longer serve
 “ me as an excuse for ignorance: you,
 “ gentlemen, have restored me my sight;
 “ you, by associating me with yourselves,
 “ have laid all books open to me; and,
 “ since I am able to hear you, I no longer
 “ envy the happiness of those who can
 “ read.”

NOTE V.

WITHOUT having known the poet
 Rousseau, no one will doubt of the truth
 of what we have said of his personal charac-
 ter, who shall have the patience to read the
 tiresome collection of his letters published
 after

after his death. He is perhaps the only writer who, in speaking of his misfortunes, has not been able to excite sympathy. His character, which displays itself at every line, represses the interest inspired by his situation. Adulatory and servile towards those whose protection he courted, he expresses himself with regard to all others with the most caustic acrimony, and often with the most shameful injustice. He vilifies "Zaire," and the "Glorieux," and heaps praises on the wretched rhimers who flattered him. But all these decisions, the offspring of passion, do not obviate the injustice done him in his competition with la Motte at the Academy, by the preference given to his rival. It would betray a still greater want of equity at the present day, to refuse him the very distinguished rank he merits on the French Parnassus; provided, however, we do not carry this zeal for his glory so far as certain great critics have done, who have ridiculously preferred

him to Voltaire, a poet, at least equal to Rousseau in harmony and imagery, and greatly his superior in sensibility, philosophy, taste, wit, and elegance. Rousseau, indeed, who died forty years before the author of "Zaire," long had in his favour the advantage which envy and folly love to give the dead over the living.

In Rousseau may be distinguished two very different poets; him who wrote in France, and him who wrote in Switzerland and Germany, and who might be taken for a different person, so inferior is he to the former. It would appear as if this unfortunate writer had been proscribed on Parnassus, and in his country, at the same time. Scarcely had he quitted France, than, deprived of objects of emulation, of severe friends, and especially of the vigilant and useful criticism of his enemies, his verse became harsh, his images strained or incongruous, and his diction ignoble

ignoble and foreign. His *Germanic* works, a small number excepted, disgrace his older productions. With respect to the last-mentioned, they are certainly those of a great poet ; but they have more correctness than grace, more harmony than thought, more energy than feeling : they are the reverse of la Motte's, that is, they are strong in style, and weak in matter. His cantatas are full of lofty poetry, and, for that very reason, little adapted to music. His comedies, some of them cold, others coarse, met with no success. Ode and epigram, two species of composition very remote from and dissimilar to each other, are those in which he has best succeeded ; like that actor who shone equally in the part of a king and of a peasant.

NOTE VI.

NOTWITHSTANDING the success of the "Maccabees," there were some equivocal moments at its first representation. Antiochus, when he causes the lovers Antigone and Misael to be arrested, pronounced these lines ;

Gardes, conduisez les dans cet appartement,

Et qu'ils soient tous deux gardés separament :

Conduct them hither, guards, and with due care

Confine them both apart :

the word *apart* excited a general laugh, which was near being fatal to the piece.

NOTE VII.

At the first representation of "Romulus," the players ventured upon a novelty. It had hitherto been the custom not to present an entertainment after a tragedy while new, but to wait till the ninth or tenth representation, when the crowd of spectators

spectators began to diminish, before the aid of a comic addition was called in. No author had hitherto deviated from the usage, through fear of shewing a distrust of success, which would often have been but too well founded. La Motte, on the contrary, thought that waiting till several representations were over, and then calling in the support, was announcing to the public that the piece began to decline. He therefore caused an entertainment to be added from the first day, and his example has ever since been followed.

NOTE VIII.

It is said that la Motte first composed the plan of "Ines de Castro" entirely from his imagination; and that he afterwards requested his friends to find some event in history to which his tragedy might apply. They could only find that of Ines, which has also furnished Camoëns with one of the finest passages of his

his "Lusiad." The author of "Ines" is further asserted to have been indebted for the scene of the two children to a celebrated advocate named Fourcroy; who, having undertaken the cause of a young man married without his father's consent, and finding himself in danger of losing it, caused, at the end of his pleading, two children, the offspring of the marriage, to be brought him: these he presented to the old man who was plaintiff against his son, and who, melting into tears at the sight, declared to the judges that he acknowledged them for his own. La Motte, informed of the effect produced upon the whole assembly by this touching scene, thought that it might be made still more interesting if transferred to the theatre. At the first representation, however, its success was for a moment dubious. The pit, little accustomed to see young children in a tragedy, hesitated a while between laughing and weeping; but concluded

cluded with plaudits and tears. The critics of "Ines," not able to deny the pathetic effect of the piece, asserted that the author had the art to make his audience weep, "they did not well know why;" a remark which has no apparent reason. The interest taken in the fate of Ines and Don Pedro is that which nature inspires in favour of two passionate and unhappy lovers.

NOTE IX.

THE comedies of la Motte are six in number, which he composed either alone, or in partnership with other authors. They were all successful in their time, and some of them have remained on the stage; as the "Port de Mer," which he wrote along with Boindin; and the "Magnifique," the subject of which he borrowed from la Fontaine's tale of that name. All his comedies are written in prose. With his way of thinking on verse, even in tragedy,

he could not avoid following the example Moliere had ventured to set, by writing so many of his pieces in prose. Several of the successors of this great dramatist had successfully imitated him in this point, and comedy, instead of being a loser, had gained by it a number of valuable works.

NOTE X.

THE talent of writing prose well is a merit that scarcely any French poet possessed before la Motte, and in which he would still rank before any other, had not Voltaire deprived him of this superiority. His answer to Madame Dacier, intitled "Reflections on Criticism," and his prefaces to his works, are master-pieces of elegance. We have spoken of his academical discourse at reception. All those which he afterwards delivered on different occasions had the same success; but the most applauded was his eulogy on Lewis XIV. pronounced at a public sitting
after

after the death of that prince. Of all the funeral orations made on this king, it is the only one which is not yet entirely forgotten, though all the pulpits of the kingdom resounded with them, and the same incense was lavished on the tomb of the monarch, as had intoxicated him when living.

NOTE XI.

WHILE some prelates employed the pen of la Motte in the service of religion, by composing their charges, others accused him of being an unbeliever. Yet among his works has been printed "A Plan of Evidence for Religion," which, according to a great judge of these matters, "is *the finest order of battle* that has ever been drawn up against the enemies of the faith, and the best calculated to force in its entrenchments that obstinate infidelity which seems daily to become more and more bold and enterprising."

It

It is true that, in this piece, religion is considered largely, disengaged from superstition and trifles, such as la Motte had ever conceived of it, after his escape from la Trappe, to letters, reason, and society.

He was very far from seeking honour from his religious works, and kept the secret of the prelates who employed him. He confessed, however, to a friend, that he had written the mandate of cardinal de Tencin for the convocation of the council of Embrun, and the discourse of the same prelate at the opening of this too famous council, where the old bishop of Senes, worthy of the first ages of the church from his piety, but without credit or friends at court, was so rigorously deposed; an act condemned by his partisans as a scandalous injustice; while his adversaries strongly insisted, that all the canonical rules respecting deposition had been most scrupulously observed. All the eloquence and address of la Motte could

could not prevent this unfortunate controversy from furnishing a topic of ridicule to the enemies of religion, who with bitter irony remarked, that ecclesiastical justice was as capable as secular of oppressing innocence without the violation of any of its rules.

A letter from la Motte to Fenelon is extant, in which, with equal solidity and ingenuity, he turns into ridicule the Jansenist absurdities on grace and free-will, absurdities not less strange than those of the Jesuits on the same subject, though of an opposite nature. He had a sister, a nun, who, with a strong understanding, was yet greatly prejudiced in favour of Jansenism, which she firmly believed to be the faith of the church. La Motte, uselessly, as may be supposed, wrote her a long letter, highly sensible and pointed, in which he represents to her that the church would have lost one of its most essential characters, that of *visibility*, were we permitted

mitted to believe that it had not *visibly* proscribed the opinions of Quesnel and his followers ; he adds, that the sole part to be taken by simple Christians, is to believe, without examination, that the doctrine now taught by pastors in general is that which has been taught at all times, whatever *apparent* difference the indocility of error may pretend to observe between ancient and modern doctrine *.

* It is surprising that the ready use made of the argument of *authority*, by persons without learning, and often without sincerity, in inculcating passive submission to the most absurd and inconsistent doctrines, has not long ago completely disgusted with it all who pretend to any degree of reason or judgment in the formation of their religious systems. TRANSL,

NOTE XII.

IN his last moments, his parish priest required from him the sacrifice of a theatrical piece which he had begun. Though he had no scruple of conscience respecting it, any more than respecting those on which his reputation had been founded, he did not hesitate to obey his pastor: but, as soon as he was gone, the poet, who had shewn so much docility, could not help appreciating this pastoral rigour with all his philosophical coolness. "Observe," said he to his nephew, "what a difference
 "to a poor dying man the difference of
 "parishes makes. The rector of St. Andrew's, who has just left me, an austere
 "Jansenist, has demanded my piece in
 "order to burn it. If I had been under
 "the jurisdiction of the rector of St. Sulpice, he would have asked it from me
 "for the purpose of getting it performed
 "for the profit of his community of the
 "Infant

“ Infant Jesus.” This quiet reflection of la Motte was much more philosophical than the jest of the musician Lully, when he was forced to deliver to his confessor an opera of which he had composed two acts. As his son was loudly lamenting the loss, “ Hold your tongue,” whispered the old libertine, “ Colasse has a copy.” These were his last words.

EULOGY

OF

CHARLES PERRAULT.

CHARLES PERRAULT was born at Paris on January 12th, 1628. Peter Perrault, his father, an advocate in parliament, a man of virtue and lover of letters, who was acquainted with the whole extent of the sacred duties of a parent, took a large share in the education of his children, of whom Charles was the youngest. At the age of eight he was placed in the college of Beauvais, where he distinguished himself in his classes. He was passionately fond of verses, and occasionally made some so good, at least in his regent's opinion, that this personage
used

used to ask him, with an air of intelligence, whence he had gotten them? The young versifier was, however, a proof (not a rare case, especially among poets) that if a passion for an art often indicates a disposition to excel in it, this is not always an infallible symptom; that the understanding may be deceived, as well as the senses, by taking an imaginary and fictitious craving, for a real natural want; and that if there are sometimes, according to a modern philosopher, “mistakes of feeling and affection,” there are also mistakes of talent and genius.

Philosophy, even of the merely disputatious kind, had still more attractions for Charles Perrault than the study of belles-lettres. He was so fond of disputing, that vacation-days, so dear to college youth in general, appeared to him so many days lost. This philosophy, however, was no other than the detestable jargon of the schools, which, to the shame of reason, has reigned
so

so long, and has not even yet entirely resigned the field, notwithstanding the contempt into which its fooleries are fallen. But it furnished a sort of food to the understanding of the young scholar, impatient to exercise itself even upon chimæras, and suited to matters of reasoning rather than of taste.

A quarrel with his master obliged him to quit the college, but did not cause him to renounce his studies; on the contrary, they were only rendered more serious and solid. He associated himself with a friend of nearly the same age: they read together good authors, made extracts from them, and sometimes even ventured to criticise them; being from that period resolved to pay to the greatest writers only a considerate, and, if they could, a reasonable homage. Charles Perrault has more than once confessed, that this second education of his own forming was beyond comparison more useful to him than the first. What

is learned alone, and without help, is always what is best learned; and perhaps nothing is perfectly acquired but in this manner. How many illustrious persons in every class have had no master but themselves, and have been so much the greater for it?

Burlesque, since so justly degraded, was then much in vogue, and almost in honour. Our two young friends, whose taste was not yet sufficiently formed to be sensible of all the insipidity of this wretched species of composition, amused themselves with turning the sixth book of the *Æneid* into burlesque verse. They also wrote another work of this kind, which was even printed, but which, luckily for their reputation, has fallen into such oblivion that its title is wholly insignificant to our readers. Charles Perrault had too much sense, especially when his ideas were matured by reflection, to attach the least value to this juvenile production; yet he used to assert,
when

when attempting to throw ridicule on the fanatical partisans of antiquity, that if they had met with the fiction which formed the base of his work, in a poet two thousand years old, they would not have failed to celebrate it as an effort of genius.

At the termination of his studies he was admitted an advocate, and pleaded two causes with a success sufficient to induce the magistrates to wish to see him attached to the bar. But Colbert, who was acquainted with his merit, soon deprived the law of his services. He chose him for secretary to a small academy of four or five men of letters, who assembled at his house twice a week. This was the cradle of that learned society, since become so celebrated under the title of *the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres*. The little academy employed itself on the medals and devices required from it by Colbert in the king's name; and those proposed by Charles Perrault were almost always preferred.

ferred. He had a singular talent for compositions of this kind, which require more intellectual qualities than is generally supposed, and such as nature seldom gives in union : an imagination at the same time fertile and sober ; simplicity joined with elevation, and precision with copiousness ; a happy memory, united to a sound judgment, for the purpose of applying ingeniously and pertinently the finest passages of the ancients to modern events ; and to complete the whole, a systematic knowledge of the fine arts, of antiquity, and of existing or local conformities. We ought not, therefore, to wonder, that amidst so many medals and inscriptions, for the most part either flatly insipid, or ridiculously pompous, there are few which deserve applause. So rare are they, that it may be reckoned a kind of good fortune to be the inventors of them, nor does this good fortune happen to any but those who deserve it. In the number of these happy devices

devices may be ranked that of the medal struck on account of the apartments given by the king to the French Academy in the Louvre itself. This was *Apollo Palatinus*; an ingenious allusion to the temple of Apollo, erected within the precincts of the palace of Augustus *. It is the more a debt of justice here to take notice of this medal, as Charles Perrault not only was the author of it, but likewise procured the Academy the apartments it obtained. This favour was bestowed upon it by the monarch, at the same time that he was pleased to declare himself its *protector*. This title, hitherto borne by cardinal de Richelieu and chancellor Seguier, was (we will venture to say it for the honour of letters) too great for any one but the sovereign. Colbert, enlightened by the wise counsels of Charles Perrault, inculcated upon the king, that the protection due to genius is one of the noblest

* See NOTE I.

prerogatives of supreme authority, and which ought not to be usurped by a subject, to whom, great as he may be, it is a sufficient honour to support literature by means of his credit with his prince, to favour its progress, and to be sensible of the value of those who cultivate it. Such, especially, is one of the principal duties of men in place, honoured with the monarch's confidence :—may they never forget it !

Letters were soon after laid under a more signal obligation to Charles Perrault, than that of inhabiting a royal palace. He procured the establishment of the Academy of Sciences, which at first had the same form with the French Academy, that of perfect equality among its members ; the only one suited to a literary society. Claude Perrault, brother of Charles, a man of uncommon merit, and whom all the satire of Despréaux has not been able to render ridiculous, had a considerable
share

share in this useful establishment. He was one of the earliest and most worthy members of the infant academy, and took for his associates Huyghens, Roemer, Cassini, Mariotte, Roberval, and many other illustrious persons, whose merit and reputation have been adequately sustained by their successors, without been effaced by them.

Scarcely was the Academy of Sciences established, when Colbert set apart a yearly fund of 100,000 livres, to be distributed by the king's order among celebrated men of letters, whether French or foreigners. Charles Perrault partook likewise in the scheme of these donatives, and in their distribution. It was extended throughout Europe to the remotest north. Pensions of greater or less value, accompanied by letters still more flattering, penetrated the obscure retreat of a scholar, sometimes unknown in his own country, and who was astonished to find himself known at Versailles, and still more to receive thence a

reward for his labours. It is true that these pensions were neither exactly nor long paid ; and that Colbert, while he sought for merit even among our enemies, deprived of the king's bounty the good-hearted la Fontaine in his indigence, notwithstanding the representations of Charles Perrault ; and did it in order to punish him for an honourable action, that of having lamented, in some pathetic verses, the disgrace of his benefactor Fouquet, whose enemy Colbert was. It is further true, that, in some instances, more discernment and intelligence might have been employed in this distribution of favours, so as not to have confounded very moderate talents with eminent abilities. But in spite of these particular acts of injustice, which sovereigns are so apt to commit even in the benefits they bestow, the pensions thus diffused by Colbert have perhaps more contributed to waft the name of Lewis XIV. to the extremities of the world, than all
his

his other great and memorable deeds. So many unexpected largesses, distributed with publicity and offered with grace, interested at once a thousand tongues in Europe in celebrating the monarch ; and these tongues, with respect to their contemporaries and posterity, were those which are declarative of the public applause or censure :—an useful lesson to princes, who can neither shew themselves insensible to glory without renouncing the great actions of which it is the reward, nor be assured of obtaining it without conciliating the good-will of those who are its dispensers *.

Colbert, whose esteem for the talents and character of Charles Perrault continually increased, soon employed him in an important and confidential office. Being himself superintendant of the royal buildings, he appointed him their controul-general. In this post he conducted him,

* See NOTE II.

self with the disinterestedness of a man of worth, the intelligence of a man of knowledge and information, and the discretion of one well acquainted with the self-consequence of place-men. He instructed Colbert on all points, without seeming to instruct him, and almost without the consciousness of that minister ; and qualified him to make a display in the king's presence of all the knowledge he had acquired in these private conversations. Charles Perrault was more circumspect than that Spanish minister, who, after a conference in which he had the misfortune to make the king his master sensible of his superiority, said to one of his friends in confidence, " I am undone, and I must ask
 " my dismissal ; I have had the folly to
 " shew the king that I knew more than
 " he." A man of merit, Perrault's friend, attached to another minister than Colbert, complained that the minister was insensible of his value. " Believe me,"
 said

said Perrault, " it is so much the better
 " for you." Colbert himself, an old and
 dexterous flatterer, employed, with respect
 to Lewis XIV. the same artifice which Per-
 rault, without his perceiving it, practised
 towards him. He said to his son Seig-
 nelai, a man of considerable ability, but
 young and vain, " Be certain of being
 " disinherited, if ever the king should
 " come to suspect that he has less under-
 " standing than you."—" My son, make
 " thyself little," said Parmenio to Philotas
 at the court of Alexander. What would
 he have said at the courts of so many sove-
 reigns, who not being Alexanders, have
 much more occasion than he had to see
 every thing surrounding them diminished
 in their presence *.

The place of *controul*er of the buildings
 given to Charles Perrault, procured a new
 favour to the arts, that of the establishment
 of the Academies of Painting, Sculpture,

* See NOTE III.

and.

and Architecture. The consequent emulation among the artists encouraged Colbert to urge the completion of the Louvre, which all the arts were invited to embellish ; a monument worthy of a great king, but which could not be finished before the death of that minister, and which will be so when it shall please Providence to raise up another Colbert amongst us. Then it was that Claude Perrault, whose genius, equally elevated and extensive, was alike fitted for the arts and sciences, produced the design of that fine front of the Louvre, which is surpassed by none of the masterpieces of ancient or modern Italy, and the honour of which, envy has in vain attempted to ravish from its author.

If a general view be taken of the services rendered by Charles and Claude Perrault to letters, to the sciences, to the arts, and consequently to that part of the nation which desired and deserved to be enlightened, it will perhaps be admitted that
this

this family of private citizens, so much the topic of satirical abuse, has done little less for the glory of its sovereign, than if decorated with the most distinguished employments. But it is the lot of modest and powerless merit to experience the injustice of contemporaries, without always meeting with a compensation from posterity.

The credit Charles Perrault enjoyed, and the gratitude due to him from men of letters, had, from the year 1671, given him admission into the French Academy. On the day of his reception, he returned thanks in an harangue, which gave so much satisfaction to the society, that they from that time resolved to make public the admission-discourses of their members. It is true they subjected themselves on these occasions too strictly to formulas of compliments and eulogies, now long worn threadbare, and from which it is to be hoped that they will sometime free themselves altogether.

The

The favour of the great is rarely lasting; and usually it is the less so, the more it is merited. Charles Perrault, sensible to gratitude, but incapable of meanness, did not conceive that servility was the proper payment for benefits, and would have thought, by an abject behaviour, that he degraded his benefactor as much as himself. He underwent mortifications from Colbert which compelled him to retire. The minister was not long in perceiving the loss of Perrault, and made attempts to regain him: but the time was past. Perrault, instructed by experience, preferred repose and liberty to new honours, and new storms. He made his retreat to a house he possessed in the suburb of St. Jaques, the vicinity of which to the colleges facilitated his superintendence of the education of his sons. These were two in number; and he chose to be their preceptor, as his father had been his. In the tranquillity of domestic life, he experienced

experienced how much the pure pleasures enjoyed by a parent in the bosom of his family, are preferable to the illusions of court favour, and the chimæras of vanity.

After the death of Colbert, he received a fresh mortification, that of having his name erased from the Academy of Medals, by Louvois. This minister did not love Colbert; and his hatred to the patron fell upon the person patronised, though he had ceased to be so. It is thus that men in power have often taken vengeance of their enemies or rivals, in the persons of those who could be neither. We have just seen that Colbert himself was not exempt from this littleness, in the injustice he displayed towards la Fontaine.

Happily for Perrault, letters, which he had so much loved, and laid under such obligations, became the consolation and delight of his retreat. He employed his leisure in the composition of several works,
among

among which were his "Poem on the
 "Age of Lewis the Great," and his
 "Parallel between the Ancients and Mo-
 "derns." The long and bitter war these
 pieces excited between Despréaux and the
 author is well known. The chief fault of
 Perrault was to have censured the ancients
 in bad verses, and thereby to have given a
 great advantage to Despréaux, the for-
 midable lord of the poetical domain. Had
 the two adversaries combated in prose,
 the match would have been more equal.
 In the collection of Despréaux's works
 may be seen a letter addressed to him by
 Perrault in the height of this warfare,
 against which this great poet's prose,
 somewhat inclined to harshness and pon-
 derosity, is scarcely able to sustain itself,
 notwithstanding all the author's talents for
 sarcasm and irony. Perrault's letter,
 though filled with reproaches, for the
 most part well merited by his antagonist,
 is a model of decorum and delicacy. This
 moderation

moderation revenges his cause better than outrageous satire would have done. A similar conduct in a like case has never failed to succeed; and we may wonder that men of letters so rarely have been induced by this infallible success to adhere to it. With respect to the ground of the dispute, the two adversaries, as usual in these quarrels, are alternately right and wrong. Perrault, too little conversant in the Greek language, too exclusively sensible of the defects of Homer, shews too little feeling of the superior beauties of this great bard, and is not enough indulgent to his errors in favour of his genius: Despréaux, perpetually on his knees before his idol, defends him sometimes unhappily, and always with a rudeness almost equal to that with which the heroes of the Iliad abuse each other. To him might have been applied (as M. Thomas has done to the enthusiasts of Bossuet) what Henry IV. said to a Spanish ambassador, who justified

his sovereign concerning some weakness imputed to him: "Is not your master
 " great enough to have faults?" But
 the inflexible defender of Homer was incapable of pardoning any thing when the interests of his favourite author were at stake. This is shewn by the coolness with which, in one of his remarks on Longinus, he translates a very strange passage of Vitruvius, respecting Zoilus. After having observed, that this bad critic recited before king Ptolemy Philadelphus the work in which he lacerated Homer, long after that poet's death, Vitruvius adds, "Some say
 " that Ptolemy crucified him, others that
 " he was stoned, and others that he was
 " burned alive at Smyrna. Whichever
 " of these was the fact, *it is certain that*
 " *he well deserved his punishment, since it*
 " *could not be merited by a more odious*
 " *crime than that of censuring a writer not*
 " *in a condition to render a reason for what*
 " *he has written.*" Independently of the
 absurdity

absurdity of this maxim, Vitruvius, as Perrault well remarks, did not consider that, in speaking thus, he condemned the cruel severity with which he himself was treating the unhappy Zoilus, whom death had long rendered unable to defend himself. However this be, we are strongly tempted to believe, that the inexorable satirist, who has transcribed this passage so seriously, and with a kind of approbation, would have given Charles Perrault cause to repent, had it been his office to inflict some penalty on him for his blasphemies against the prince of poets :—so inseparable are intolerance and fanaticism from every species of superstitious worship * !

The ill-humour of Despréaux against his antagonist overflowed upon the Academy, which, according to him, ought to have inflicted an exemplary punishment upon the heresiarch ; but which, contenting itself with paying due homage to the an-

* See NOTE IV.

cients, thought fit to leave its members the liberty of appreciating them at their own risk. The implacable avenger of the Iliad affirmed, that the society, by not shutting the mouth of Charles Perrault, and even by leaving its doors open to him, gave a more scandalous judgment against the ancients than he had done ; “ and especially,” said he, “ against good sense, “ to which it was hostile, as an ancient of “ much older standing than Homer and “ Virgil.” He added, in the height of his rage, that the device of the Academy ought to be changed for that of a group of monkeys admiring themselves in a fountain, with the motto, “ *sibi pulchri—* “ charming in their own eyes.” The Academy only laughed at these poetical fallies, and, at least, gave the satirist an example of that temper, which it is unfortunate to lose for such objects *.

It

* Well indeed may men of sense, and men of the world, despise the bitter quarrels among men of letters,

It is asserted, that the enmity of Despréaux against the author of the "Poem on Louis le Grand" had a secret cause, more potent than his devotion for the ancients; which was, that the writer, when justly celebrating the great Corneille, had affected to avoid all mention of the author of "Phædra," and "Iphigenia." There is some reason to believe that Despréaux was not better satisfied with the silence observed with respect to himself in this poem, which had not disdained to notice Godeaux and Tristan. But the satirist's self-love, in the displeasure he professed,

ters, when they learn the frivolous occasions which excite them! It would seem, from the coarse and intemperate language used by scholars in their mutual attacks, as if they meant as much as possible to belie the applauded sentence of Ovid in favour of the effects of polite literature;

Emollit mentes, nec finit esse feros.

TRANSL.

M 3

prudently

prudently concealed itself behind his friendship for Racine, and perhaps was thus concealed even from himself. If on this occasion he displayed an excess of feeling, his adversary had been guilty of great injustice. To deprive the age of Lewis XIV. of Despréaux and Racine, is to deprive the age of Augustus of Horace and Virgil.

The enmity of the two academicians was of older date than their quarrel concerning the ancients and moderns. Charles Perrault and his brothers, friends of those writers whom Despréaux had treated with most severity, did not content themselves with a silent disapprobation of his attacks upon them; they freely expressed their sentiments of the satirist, who, on his part, did not spare them. We ought not, on this occasion, to suppress an anecdote of Perrault which does him much honour. The French Academy, in 1671, had proposed as the subject of their first poetical prize, *the abolition of duels*. Some days before

before the prizes were distributed, Perrault had spoken highly in commendation of the successful piece, the writer of which, M. de la Monnoye, was unknown. A person who heard him, said to Perrault, "You would be much surprised were the piece to prove Despréaux's."—"Were it the devil's," answered Perrault, "it deserves the prize, and shall have it." It will be said, perhaps, that this was merely an act of equity; but equity with regard to an enemy, and one from whom injuries have been received, is an act of heroism worthy of Socrates or Epictetus *. Despréaux, on his part, as if through emulation, rendered some justice

* Surely much more is made of this trifling circumstance than it merits. Perrault could not decently withdraw the praise he had given; and, after all, the piece was *not* Despréaux's. It is representing literary hostility as truly savage, to extol so highly instances of ordinary justice between the contending parties. **TRANSL.**

to Perrault, and even on account of his verses. He praised the six lines which conclude the preface to Perrault's "Parallèles," though the ancients are not treated in them with much respect; but they contain a stroke of satire, which Despréaux applied to Dacier's translations, and which reconciled him to their other contents.

The learned and heavy Dacier was one of the most outrageous adversaries of Perrault, who one day complained of this circumstance to Fontenelle. "How can you expect," said the philosopher, "that M. Dacier should pardon you? In attacking the ancients, you cry down a coin of which his chest is full, and which constitutes his whole wealth." The reflection would have been still more just, had Fontenelle, after giving this consolation to Perrault, added, that among many false pieces, the coin accumulated by Dacier contained ingots of the purest gold,
the

the value of which was best known to those who possessed most riches of their own. But it is too true that honest Dacier, while contemplating his precious chest, the depository of his imagined opulence, little knew how to distinguish the counterfeit metal from the genuine. Hence Despréaux was used to say that the ancients had much more to complain of their translator Dacier than their traducer Perault.

Our academician, besides the verses alluded to, has written some others not unworthy of praise. Such are those in his poem "on Painting," in which he happily, and even poetically, describes the beauties added by time to pictures. In these lines, the image he draws of time giving the finishing touches to the master-pieces of great artists, while with a sponge he effaces even the remembrance of inferior productions, is noble and picturesque. Somewhat more of harmony and elegance in the

the expression would have rendered this draught worthy of the first masters.

When the quarrel between Despréaux and Perrault had lasted long enough to make them both almost equally in the wrong, and the two adversaries had fatiated themselves, the one with reproaches, the other with epigrams; when even the public began to grow weary of it; common friends, who ought sooner to have interposed, endeavoured to effect a reconciliation. They were, indeed, entitled to mutual esteem, which the one commanded by his uncommon powers, the other by his knowledge and understanding, and both by their probity. On the side of Perrault the reconciliation was sincere. He even suppressed several strokes against the ancients, which he had in reserve for the fourth volume of his "Parallels;" "Choosing rather," said he, "to deprive
" himself of the satisfaction of producing
" fresh proofs of the goodness of his cause,
" than

" than longer to embroil himself with
 " persons of merit like that of his adver-
 " saries, whose friendship could not be
 " purchased at too high a rate." With
 respect to Despréaux, he wrote what he
 termed a letter of *reconciliation* to Perrault;
 but in which, through its forced compli-
 ments, he could not avoid displaying that
 relic of gall or malignity, of which it is so
 difficult for a professed satirist entirely to
 discharge himself. This letter might almost
 pass for a new critique on Perrault, so equi-
 vocal was the turn of its reparation. Ac-
 cordingly, a friend of Despréaux said to
 him, " I doubt not that we shall always
 " keep upon good terms together ; but if
 " ever, after a difference, we should be
 " reconciled, no reparation ! I beg : I fear
 " your reparations more than your re-
 " proaches *."

We shall pass over some works of Per-
 rault, less considerable than the two which

* See NOTE V.

made him most talked of, and most disturbed his repose. We shall only mention his "History of Illustrious Men of the Age of Lewis XIV." Freed from his controversy with Despréaux, but still a zealous partisan for his age, Perrault celebrated its glory in this work, which did equal honour to his understanding and his impartiality. Somewhat more life and colouring might be desired in it, but not more sincerity and justice. The author even confesses that he has denied himself ornament, for the purpose of giving more truth to his narration, by limiting encomium to the simple recital of facts. "I was not ignorant," says he, "that if I had made these eulogies more eloquent, I should have derived more glory from them; but I thought only of the glory of those whom I commemorate. It is well known that funeral orations, in general, are more the eulogy of the preacher than of the deceased; and that if the

" repu.

“ reputation of the composer is often augmented by them, that of the subject almost always remains what it was before.” To this work may therefore be applied what Cicero says of Cæsar’s Commentaries ; “ They are simple, plain, and graceful, denuded of every ornament of language.” But it would, doubtless, be too much to add the praise which Cicero subjoins to that of Cæsar ; “ Perhaps he has pleased the unskilful, by leaving them something to flourish upon ; but he has deterred men of judgment from taking up the pen after him.”

Among the illustrious persons whose eulogy Perrault had drawn up, were Arnauld and Pascal, who well merited a distinguished place in his work. But their enemies, the Jesuits, whose intrigues it would at this day be useless to disguise, since our age has done justice to them, caused an order to be given to Perrault to expunge these names. On this occasion that fine

passage of Tacitus was quoted, where, speaking of a ceremonial in which the images of many great men were carried in procession, he says, " Cassius and Brutus " shone with superior lustre, because their " statues were *not* seen among the rest." After the death of Lewis XIV., the protector and dupe of the enemies of Pascal and Arnauld, their names were restored to the place whence they ought never to have been banished. Charles Perrault was encouraged to render this justice to the two most celebrated Jansenists, by one of his brothers, a doctor of the Sorbonne, greatly attached to the Port-Royal, and very little so to the Jesuits, in which he agreed with Despréaux. But this conformity of sentiments did not render the poet more favourable to the family of Perraults. He was still more the friend of Homer, than of Janfenius and Saint-Cyran.

Sixty years after the death of Charles Perrault, which happened in May 1703,
his

his memoirs, written by himself, have been published. They are estimable from a striking character of openness and sincerity, and curious from some anecdotes they contain, principally relative to the vanity and singular fallies of the Cavalier Bernini, who was sent for at a vast expence from Italy to build the Louyre, while France possessed a Pujet and Claude Perrault. It were to be wished that literary men of merit should thus write their own memoirs ; on the condition, however, (scarcely to be expected from human weakness,) that they should speak of themselves with that frankness which adds so much value to abilities. Minds of a right cast are little less interested in seeing a natural, and, as it were, a careless draught of those who have enlightened their contemporaries, than of those who have governed them, well or ill. The history of the former is that of the progress of the noblest exertions of the human intellect ; the history of the latter is often only that of our crimes and miseries.

NOTES
TO THE
EULOGY OF PERRAULT.

NOTE I.

THE following explanation of the inscription *Apollo Palatinus*, affixed to the Academy's medal, is given in the Medallic History of the King. "Apollo holds his
" lyre rested upon the tripod whence his
" oracles proceeded. In the back-ground
" is the principal front of the Louvre.
" The legend, *Apollo Palatinus*, signifies
" *Apollo in the palace of Augustus* *."

* It should be observed, in favour of the justness of the application, that this temple of Apollo also contained a public library. TRANSL.

This

This device, as well as several others made by the infant Academy of Inscriptions, is happier than the famous inscription, *Nec pluribus impar*, conceived by an antiquary of moderate abilities for a medal struck to the honour of Lewis XIV. The medal represented a sun enlightening the world, and the sense of the inscription was, that it might have enlightened several worlds at once; an allusion, thought very ingenious, to the extensive knowledge and profound wisdom of the monarch. Independently of the absurdity of this excess of adulation, it was not easy, on viewing the medal, immediately to guess the application of its device; an essential fault in works of this kind. When, however, it was presented by its author to the Academy of Inscriptions, for its judgment, this society did not chuse to object to it, still less to propose another, apprehending, doubtless, that they should not so happily flatter the self-love of the *Master*. Unfortunately it was

afterwards discovered that the same device had been already employed to the honour of the detestable Philip II.*; at least it was so asserted by some foreign antiquaries, who were not paid, like the French antiquaries, to bestow such exaggerated and insipid praise upon Lewis XIV.

Colbert having applied to Charles Perrault for a device for the Dauphin, then only four years old, who already appeared to have much taste for military shows, our academician gave the following, which was preferred to many others. The emblem is a flash of lightning bursting from a cloud, with the motto, "Et ipso terret in ortu;" "It inspires terror at its very birth." This, says Perrault in his memoirs, was put upon the colours of the Dauphin's regiment, and the coats of his guards. We should have been better

* And with much more propriety; as it alluded to the *other world* which made a part of the Spanish monarchy. TRANSL.

pleased with one calculated to inspire love rather than fear for this young prince*.

NOTE II.

THE following is the list of men of letters, both natives and foreigners, who received pensions. In France, Chapelain, d'Ablancourt, Conrart, *Gomberville, Cotin, Bourzeis, Charpentier, Perrault, Flechier, Cassagnes, Desmarets, Corneille, Segrais, Racine, Huet, Mezeray, le Clerc, Gombault, la Chambre, Silhon, Boyer, Quinault.* In foreign countries, the Allatiuses, count Gratiani, Ottavio Ferrari, Carlo Dati, Viviani, Isaac Vossius, Heinsius, Gronovius, Huyghens, Gaspar Gevartius, Boeclerus, Reinesius, Wagenschilius, Hevelius, Herman Conringius †. This list justifies

* This device is, indeed, an example equally ridiculous and disgusting of the servile and crouching spirit prevalent under absolute monarchy. TRANSL.

† It is worthy of remark, that no Englishman appears in this list. As this country was by no

justifies our remark on the mixture made in it of mediocrity with superior merit. We have put in *Italic* those names which might have been omitted, among the French. To these Despréaux would have added those of *Chapelain* and *Perrault*; but he would have been unjust. Both these persons, though bad poets, were in other respects very estimable, for the extent of their literature and variety of their knowledge, and even for their taste, which, though mistaken as to their own works, judged well of those of others.

means destitute of men of merit in science and literature at that time, the probable cause of this exception does it honour. For it seems to have been, either that our learned countrymen were not in circumstances to need pecuniary bounty, or that they were thought not likely to make a sufficient return for it in compliment and adulation. If an aversion to the English nation in the despotic Lewis was another cause, neither is that to its discredit. TRANSL.

The

The list of French literati to whom Lewis XIV., or rather Colbert, gave pensions, is curious from the qualifications subjoined to each of the names. We read in it, "To the sieur *Boyer*, an *excellent* French poet—to the sieur *le Clerc*, an *excellent* French poet—to the sieur *Racine*, a French poet, 600 livres—to the sieur *Desmarets*, endowed with *the finest imagination in the world*, 1200 livres—to the sieur *Huet*, a *great personage* who has translated *Origen*, 1500 livres—to the sieur *Chapelain*, *the greatest French poet that ever existed*, and of the most solid judgment, 3000 livres," &c.

Whatever surprize may be excited by the mode of classifying writers and their talents in this singular catalogue, it will be somewhat diminished by the knowledge, 1. that it was drawn up in 1663, and that Racine had as yet written none of his tragedies, not even the "*Thebaide*," which did not appear till the following

year; 2. that Chapelain, so ridiculously praised in this list, was, if not the framer of it, (which Christian charity forbids to suppose,) at least its director and principal adviser, in concert with Charles Perrault, who is characterised and rewarded more modestly, as one *able in poetry and belles-lettres*, 1500 livres.

Cardinal Richelieu, who was sensible to all kinds of glory, or, if any one chooses to call it so, of vain glory, had also the idea of pensioning some learned foreigners, in order to procure himself panegyriste throughout Europe. He offered one to the learned Usher, archbishop of Armagh in Ireland, who, though an archbishop, was far from rich; for opulence, said he, is reserved for the Catholic prelates *. Usher, instead of accepting the cardinal's *gracious* offer, sent him a present

* This is not exactly the fact, and the Irish prelates are in general very tolerably provided for. TRANSL.

of greyhounds, a species of dogs of which Ireland possesses an excellent breed. This spirited and pleasant reply indisposed the minister against making similar offers to others, under the hazard of receiving similar thanks.

NOTE III.

SOLOMON, as a modern writer observes, has long ago said, "beware of appearing
"wise before the prince." He does not say, "beware of *being* wise," but of *appearing* so. Convinced of the justness of this maxim, the ministers of Lewis XIV. feared nothing so much as to see themselves associated with the monarch in the praises lavished upon him by the poets and artists. "Always full of the king," (says the abbé Choisy,) "Colbert's whole
"thoughts were employed to immortalise
"his memory." He was very innocent with respect to the serpents and adders * which

* These were the arms of Colbert.

le Brun caused to be put upon all the window-shutters of the Louvre. The king, however, rallied him upon it somewhat tartly; and the poor man, in great consternation, sent for Perrault, comptroller of the buildings, who told him, without hesitation, that beneath a victor sun (Lewis's emblem) it was quite proper to place a serpent Python. Colbert ordered Perrault instantly to write a letter in which this reason was explained; and the next day he showed it to the king, who laughed at him for having taken the matter so seriously. The serpents, however, were taken away, and are no more to be seen on the shutters. They only remain cut in stone, on the windows of the gallery of the Louvre, because they could not be removed without a great deal of scaffolding, and the people would have diverted themselves at the expence of the person concerned. M. de Louvois, who knew this little anecdote, going to the Invalids while

while they were daubing the paltry pictures there, flew into a violent passion with the painter, who had placed him near the king, and had endeavoured to hit his likeness. "No, no," said he, "disfigure me all these faces about which you have taken so much pains, and let no one be known but the Master."

NOTE IV.

WHAT put Despréaux most out of humour in the dispute concerning the ancients, was, that his antagonist Perrault, far from sharing his enthusiasm, unmercifully denied that he himself possessed it. Despréaux had said, "Whenever I read Demosthenes, I repent that I ever wrote."—"May I venture," says Perrault, "to ask, where you read this great orator? Is it in the original? But M. Dacier, who knows Greek as well as a modern can know it, whispers, (and
" would

“ would say aloud, had you not em-
 “ ployed your common friends to close his
 “ mouth,) that you are very moderately
 “ acquainted with this language, and that
 “ your translation of Longinus is a proof
 “ of it. Moreover, were you as well
 “ versed in Greek as M. Dacier, do you
 “ imagine that you could appreciate the
 “ merit of Demosthenes in his own lan-
 “ guage, which he spoke so superiorly?
 “ The Athenians were justly ravished by
 “ his eloquence, because no part of it was
 “ lost upon that ingenious and susceptible
 “ people, who being thoroughly ac-
 “ quainted with all the beauties and de-
 “ licacies of their language, admired in
 “ Demosthenes the propriety, the force,
 “ the elevation, the elegance of his ex-
 “ pressions, the enchanting harmony of
 “ his periods, and his inimitable delivery,
 “ celebrated even by his enemy *Æschines*.
 “ But almost all these beauties are lost
 “ upon us, who know neither how to
 “ write

“ write nor to pronounce Greek, as you
 “ yourself must admit. They were not
 “ lost upon Cicero, who had learned this
 “ fine language at Athens, at a period
 “ when it was still flourishing. I have,
 “ therefore, no difficulty in giving credit
 “ to the Roman orator for the praises he
 “ bestows on his illustrious rival; but
 “ with respect to you, M. Despréaux, per-
 “ mit me to think that you speak often
 “ by rote; and that Demosthenes trans-
 “ lated into French, the only language in
 “ which you can form a judgment of him,
 “ need not affect either Bossuet or your-
 “ self with despair. I allow that the
 “ Greek orator still *breathes* more or less
 “ feebly in the translations from him, but
 “ he *lives* only in his own language, in
 “ which, unfortunately, he is nearly dead
 “ to you as well as to me. Confess even
 “ that Cicero, notwithstanding the supe-
 “ riority he seems to grant to Demos-
 “ thenes, pleases you more, not because
 “ he

“ he is really superior, for of that we are
 “ both ignorant, but because you under-
 “ stand Latin not quite so ill as Greek,
 “ though very imperfectly, as is the case
 “ with respect to all dead languages. I will
 “ assert nearly the same with regard to Pin-
 “ dar, the object of enthusiasm to you, and
 “ sometimes of reproach to me. Horace,
 “ and all Grecian antiquity both before
 “ and after him, admired this poet, and
 “ doubtless Horace and the Greeks were
 “ good judges; at present the greater
 “ part of Pindar’s beauties are vanished,
 “ because these beauties, still more than
 “ those of Demosthenes, depended upon
 “ the admirable use he made of his lan-
 “ guage, which was better known to the
 “ meanest peasant in Bœotia, than to the
 “ most learned modern. One might then
 “ say to the enthusiasts of Pindar, I be-
 “ lieve with you, or rather with Horace,
 “ that Pindar was an incomparable poet;
 “ but in what respect? Horace could an-

“ fwer this question, but neither you nor
“ I can. Why then do you accuse me
“ of despising the ancients? I admit that
“ they contain beauties of the first rank,
“ in great number, and of all kinds; but
“ I cannot approve in them what you dare
“ not yourself imitate, notwithstanding
“ your admiration for them. And if the
“ ancients are so much our superiors, why
“ has not Racine composed his tragedies
“ in the manner of Euripides and So-
“ phocles, Moliere his comedies in that of
“ Aristophanes, and la Fontaine his fables
“ in that of Esop? Set some bounds,
“ therefore, to your exclamations, and
“ confess that, if the ancients are great,
“ the moderns are so likewise *.”

Such,

* In this letter there are, doubtless, some just, though pretty obvious remarks; but the argument *from ignorance* is pushed somewhat too far, as might be expected from one who was no scholar. It will hold with respect to the delicacies of phraseology in
the

Such, in substance, if not in direct terms, was our academician's reply to Despréaux. It would be difficult not to subscribe to the greater part of these reflections; but notwithstanding the just encomium they contain of the ancients, whoever should have the courage to approve this literary philosophy, would be decried in all the colleges and journals as the enemy of Demosthenes and Homer; and would even be abused by some, who in their hearts were of the same opinion, but who

the ancient authors, and in great part with respect to the rhythm of their prose, and measure of their verse. But many of the beauties of style, and all the greater excellencies of composition, are objects of critical judgment at all times, and in all civilized countries. Horace, in his praise of Pindar, refers to the pathos and sublimity of his thoughts, as well as to the rapid flow of his numbers; and the characters of Homer and Virgil, as poets, are nearly as intelligible at present as they ever could have been. TRANSL.

would

would eagerly seize this pretext for blackening him, as aiming at the destruction of good taste.

It appears that in the whole of this controversy, maintained with as much fury as if it had been a theological war, the chief cause of dispute was the want of understanding each other. "Folly on both sides," is the usual motto of all quarrels; and it is the more just, as antagonists, apparently the most opposite in opinion, would often be surprized, on explaining the ground of their difference, to find themselves much nearer each other than they imagined. It is probable, that with respect to the truly admirable parts of the ancients, the disputants were agreed, without acknowledging it. I doubt not that Perrault and his partisans would have rendered equal justice with Despréaux to the really sublime pictures of Homer, to those verses of an original stamp by which, he is characterised, and which no poet
shares

shares with him ; to the episode of Orpheus and Eurydice in the Georgics, and the fourth book of the *Æneid*, of Virgil * ; and to so many other master-pieces of antiquity. The dispute turned only upon those passages of the ancients, neither the beauties nor defects of which we are in a condition exactly to appreciate. However this be, there resulted from this vehement altercation what will always result from disputes in which passion mingles ; both parties were almost equally losers. On the one side, several well-founded objections have been made to the ancients, which have somewhat weakened the unlimited veneration in which they were held ; on the other, the champions of antiquity have often thrown deserved ridicule upon their antagonists. “ When I see,” says a writer of our times, “ men of letters take part

* This is poor and vulgar praise of a poet so profuse of beauties, so singularly *poetical*, as Virgil.

TRANSL.

with

" with so much bitterness, some with the
 " ancients, others with the moderns, I
 " think I behold the two wives of the
 " fable, the elder of whom plucks the
 " black hairs from her husband's head,
 " the younger the white hairs, so that the
 " poor man is at last made quite bald."

A Latin writer, now little read, and indeed
 belonging to an age not highly enlight-
 ened, has displayed peculiar moderation
 and justice on this question. " We ought,"
 says Sulpicius Severus, " to read the
 " ancients without prepossession, and the
 " moderns without envy."

No one, in our opinion, has shown a
 sounder judgment in this controversy, than
 the illustrious author of the Age of
 Lewis XIV. " Perrault," says he, " has
 " been reproached with overcharging the
 " defects of the ancients; but his great
 " fault was, that he made himself enemies
 " of those whom he might have opposed
 " to the ancients. This dispute has been,

“ and long will be, an affair of party, as
 “ it was in the time of Horace. How
 “ many persons are there still in Italy,
 “ who not being able to read Homer with-
 “ out disgust, and daily reading Ariosto
 “ and Tasso with transport, continue to
 “ call Homer incomparable!” In many
 other parts of his works it may be seen
 with what taste and equity this celebrated
 writer conciliates the respect due to the
 ancients, with contempt of the prejudice
 which has idolized even their faults.

NOTE V.

DESPREAUX, even after his reconcilia-
 tion, always acted towards Perrault, and
 spoke of him, as one who had been an
 enemy. He writes to one of his friends,
 “ I have not sent you word of the death of
 “ Perrault, because, to speak freely, I
 “ took no other interest in it than that we
 “ take in the death of all persons of good
 “ character. He did not receive very
 “ favourably

" favourably the letter I addressed to him
 " in my last edition, and I question if he
 " was satisfied with it. I however attended
 " the service which the Academy caused
 " to be performed for him ; and his son
 " assured me, that on his death-bed he had
 " charged him to deliver me abundance of
 " civil remembrances. His death has been
 " the cause of a great mortification to the
 " Academy, which had elected M. de
 " Lamoignon for his successor ; but that
 " magistrate in plain terms refused the
 " honour, apparently to avoid the task of
 " praising the enemy of Cicero and Virgil."
 The detail of this anecdote, and the true
 cause of M. de Lamoignon's refusal, will
 appear in the article of the cardinal De
 Soubise *. The cardinal de Rohan shewed

* Not translated. This cause was, that Lamoignon had been set up for the purpose of excluding Chaulieu, who was obnoxious to the king, but protected by two princes of the blood. Lamoignon therefore prudently withdrew from the competition, though he had the unanimous voice of the Academy in his favour. TRANSL.

himself less difficult, and was not afraid of rendering our academician all the justice he merited, in his discourse on reception. M. de Turreil, then director, in his reply to the admitted prelate, apologized with much ingenuity for the preference which Charles Perrault had given to the moderns over the ancients, by *accusing* as the cause (if we may so express it) those "illustrious men whose names adorned the academic list," and most of whom, in extolling past ages at the expence of their own, "had shewn themselves too generous, and perhaps too modest." Thus he interested the self-love of his auditors in behalf of Perrault's memory; which was the surest way to render them favourable to the panegyrist, and indulgent to the eulogy he was to deliver.

EULOGY
OF
CLAUDE FLEURY.

CLAUDE FLEURY, born at Paris Dec. 6, 1640, was the son of an esteemed advocate, and himself for a considerable time attended the bar. There are even extant printed memorials signed by him, which he composed in his youth, and which display the germ and promise of the extensive knowledge and justness of thinking which characterise his other works. But how flattering soever were his prospects of success in this career, a natural taste for piety and retirement induced him to quit the profession of the law, and embrace the ecclesiastical state,

His vocation was not, like that of many others, the desire of making his fortune; and the purity of his life was correspondent.

He was admitted to the conferences which the great Bossuet held at his own house on the holy scriptures, and on subjects of religion, and sometimes of literature. Assemblies with such a head would not have admitted men of inferior merit as members. A secretary was especially wanted, worthy of the president. The pen was entrusted to the Abbé Fleury, and in this excellent school he made the first essay of those talents which he was afterwards to exercise so much for the advantage of the church.

About this time he translated into Latin the celebrated work of Bossuet, intitled "Exposition of the Catholic Doctrine;" a work, the purpose of which was to undeceive the Protestants concerning the ideas
they

they had formed of several dogmas of the Romish church. This translation, which was carefully revised by Bossuet, is one of the most solid answers that can be made to the imputation so pertinaciously brought by the reformed ministers against the bishop of Meaux, of having in his book softened the dogmas to which they were averse, and of having, according to the expression they affected to use, wished to hasten the triumph of the *faith* at the expence of *good faith*. The well-known candour of the abbé Fleury is an undeniable guarantee, that even his zeal for the best cause would not have led him to translate a work in which truth had been in the least degree disguised. If Bossuet's extreme activity in making proselytes, which to prejudiced eyes might appear a kind of ambition, furnished a pretext to envy for accusing him of ungoverned ardour, the simplicity and sincerity of the abbé Fleury's cha-

rafter repelled even suspicion, and sheltered the author behind his translator *.

The life of this respectable writer, noiseless and unostentatious as his person, was so uniform and so little eventful, that his history is solely that of his works. Of these the most considerable is his "Ecclesiastical History," the labour of thirty years; of which he published twenty volumes, comprehending the space of fourteen centuries, from the establishment of Christianity to the opening of the council of Constance. He was satisfied, he said, that his age and infirmities, which did not permit him to finish his history,

* Too much stress seems to be laid upon this consideration. The abbé Fleury, then young in theological studies, and overawed by the authority of Bossuet, was not likely to hesitate in becoming his translator, though he might afterwards come to view things in a different light. In his own character as a writer, he certainly displays a candour and liberality which Bossuet was far from possessing. **TRANSL.**

had

had at least permitted him to close his labours with the remarkable epoch of that celebrated assembly, which fixed such just and prudent limits to the spiritual monarchy of the popes, or rather to their pontifical pretensions; and which is, with respect to the church, what the treaty of Westphalia is with respect to the Germanic empire—the safeguard of its rights and independence. Nevertheless, the very circumstance of the important part taken by the council of Constance relatively to the catholic church, excites a regret that the abbé Fleury was unable to write its history, and that of the excellent decrees it passed against the pretended infallibility and the too real despotism of the sovereign pontiffs. We may still more regret the loss of the edifying and sincere confession which this sage historian would doubtless have made, of the unhappy stains which obscure the splendor of an assembly, worthy in several points of our respect and applause, but
which

which the celebrated John Gerson accused of having had two weights and two measures in its doctrine and conduct. The abbé Fleury, penetrated as he was with the genuine spirit of Christianity, would certainly, with equal strength and grief, have deplored the shocking punishment of John Hufs and Jerome of Prague, so fatal to the glory of the council. He would loudly have condemned the unopposed barbarity exercised against these two unfortunate men, immoveable, indeed, in their opinions, but irreproachable in their morals;—he would have exclaimed against these sanguinary ministers of a God of peace, who delivered to the flames other ministers of the same God, in defiance of the voice of humanity and public faith, before the eyes of an emperor who had the meanness and cruelty to permit it; while the same council was content with the deposition of a scandalous pope sullied with crimes (John XXIII.;) whilst it did
not

not condemn, till after long and shameful disputes among its members, the execrable doctrine of the cordelier John Petit, the apologist of the basest and most odious of assassinations * ; and while it suffered the residence of an abominable multitude of prostitutes in the very town where the council was held. How much were it to be wished that the faithful picture of this council, so afflicting in one view, so consoling in another, had been drawn by the pen of our pious and judicious author, who was so well fitted, by his unalterable candour, to write the history of a religion of peace, innocence, and charity.

The work of the abbé Fleury was received with the most merited applause. The reader, however, must not expect to find in it either that warmth of description, that strength and delicacy of pencil, or that depth of reflection, which are in vain

* See NOTE I.

sought for in the crowd of historians; which are admired in some, but even in these, frequently have the fault of fixing the attention too much on the writer, and too little on those he commemorates. The Abbé has substituted to these brilliant qualities an air of scrupulous and frank veracity, which conciliates and attaches his reader. It might be said that he has taken for his model the simplicity of the sacred writings, and that he has traced the propagation of Christianity with the same pen with which the evangelical writers have described its nativity.

The author, however, has been publicly reproached with two faults, but from which he has sufficiently exculpated himself in the opinion of equitable judges.

The first is, that he shews himself somewhat too credulous with regard to legends and miracles, especially in the early ages. He replied, that he had not, [without good reason, recorded that multitude of almost
incredible

incredible events, which illustrated and sustained the feeble infancy of the church; that in proportion as he advanced towards more luminous times, and the peaceful establishment of Christianity, the recitals of miracles and wonders became less frequent in his history; that by this he conceived that he conformed to the views of Providence in the propagation of the Christian religion; that this religion, sent from Heaven among men, but sent *to* men, had occasion, at its commencement, to be supported by prodigies, which might force incredulity and persecution to silence; that prodigies became less necessary in proportion as religion had fewer obstacles to overcome; and that, in the times in which we live, when its dominion is so securely established, miracles no longer occur, except on very rare and extraordinary occasions, for the equally Christian and philosophical reason, that supreme wisdom does nothing in vain.

A second

' A second objection made to the abbé Fleury is, that he has not spoken in a manner sufficiently guarded of certain scandalous events, over which, say the critics, he ought to have drawn the curtain, or at least to have cast a thick veil, in order not to shock the minds of weak brethren, and furnish the enemies of religion with an object for attack. Among these causes of scandal may be reckoned the usurpations of the popes on temporal authority; the spirit of faction and intrigue which appears to have reigned in various councils, and with which heresy has so often and so bitterly reproached the church; the corruption of morals among the clergy, extending even to the cloisters; the most absurd superstition infecting the sound doctrine; in fine, the errors and ambition of certain men, who in other respects possessed virtues revered by the church, and who had occasion for all their virtues in order to gain pardon for the mischiefs of which they

they were the authors. To this also the abbé Fleury replied, with a simplicity worthy alike of his piety and his understanding, that if the first duty of an historian is to speak the truth, this duty ought to be peculiarly sacred to the historian of a religion which is truth itself; that it would be imprudent, by exaggerating the beauty of a portrait, to furnish the ill-disposed with a pretext for overcharging its deformity; that the more solid are the foundations on which religion rests, the less necessary is it to conceal the means of every kind employed by an inscrutable Providence for its establishment; that even those causes which might appear calculated for its destruction were in the number of these means of propagation, and proved the most signal displays of the power of him who knows how to draw good from evil, and, according to the expression of scripture, “to raise up children to Abraham from the very stones;” that the most triumphant

triumphant proof of the divine origin of religion, is perhaps its escape from annihilation by the vices and crimes of its preachers ; and that the same God which has defended his work from the sword of persecutors, will be able to defend it to the end of time from the slow and more formidable poison of those iniquities which seem to threaten its ruin *.

Among these fatal iniquities which, according to the abbé Fleury's expression, "have so much disgraced the church," he particularly reckons the violent persecutions so often exercised against heretics. To the horrible maxims of intolerance and fanaticism, he opposes the doctrine of the gospel itself, the true interests of the faith,

* Of the reasons above suggested, whether they be the eulogist's own, or really taken from the abbé Fleury, the first is the essential one, and of weight sufficient to render all the rest unnecessary. If truth be not the genuine object of an historian, and paramount to all other considerations, he has no business to take up the pen. TRANSL.

the

the writings and conduct of the most respectable bishops, and lastly, the frightful picture of the disasters consequent upon persecution. Our virtuous historian's reflections upon this afflicting topic deserve to be read daily in all theological schools, meditated in all seminaries, and preached in all churches : they are the more worthy of praise, as the author wrote them at a time and in a kingdom where the sovereign, either deceived or ill-obeyed, gave, by his persecution of the Protestants, a sad spectacle to Europe, and a cruel example to other monarchs *.

The principles of the abbé Fleury on all these interesting objects are displayed in a manner the most satisfactory to Christian readers, in his excellent "Discourses on Ecclesiastical History," which are superior to the history itself. It is in them that this upright and enlightened spirit freely

* See NOTE II.

gives scope to reflections from which he thought proper to abstain in his great work. It is in them that he sketches a philosophical history of the Christian religion, of the shocks it has received, the supports it has met with, the revolutions it has undergone, not in the matter of its doctrines, but in the manner of teaching them. Those real or feigned zealots, who incessantly exclaim "impiety," when those abuses are attacked from which religion has so often suffered, are especially desired to peruse two of these discourses, that which treats on the crusades, and that which discusses the subject of religious orders. They will be astonished at the force with which the author, in the first of these, raises his voice against these "holy robberies beyond sea *," (so he does not scruple to call them), which ruined and depopulated Europe without making a single

* "Saints brigandages d'outre mer."

profelyte worthy of the name ; enterprises equally atrocious and absurd, by which religion would have been at once destroyed and dishonoured, had such a fate been possible. In the second discourse it will appear how feelingly the author laments the prodigious multiplication of monastic orders, which, after having served in the laudable times of the church as an asylum for humility and penitence, so often afterwards became the retreat of ignorance and laziness, and sometimes even the abode of pride and intrigue ; whence a writer of the fifteenth century, who witnessed the disorders and scandals of which the monasteries at that period afforded too many examples, has said, that if, in these seats of religion, “ piety had first brought forth “ riches, the daughter had in the end “ destroyed her mother.” The abbé Fleury, full of respect for the Cœnobites of the first ages, ventures to give his opinion with freedom on the founders of new

orders. He openly accuses them of vanity and ambition, " canonized as they are for " the most part ;" he acknowledges, or rather he asserts, that, " without prejudice " to their sanctity, we may distrust their " understanding ;" and he appears particularly to disapprove the institution of the Mendicants, notwithstanding the honour done them by Saint Lewis, who, in the midst of his court, affirmed, that if he could divide himself, he would give one half of his person to the Cordeliers, and the other half to the Jacobins. Those philosophers who have latterly so much declaimed against the crusades, and the pernicious multitude of monks, have not made such formidable attacks on these two foes to mankind and Christianity, as the abbé Fleury has done in the two above-mentioned discourses ; because he added to the enlarged views which these philosophical censors might possess, a sincere love for religion, which perhaps they had
not,

not, and a moderation from which they have sometimes departed.

We shall not enter into a particular consideration of another equally valuable discourse, in which the author fixes the limits, so long unknown, and so often surpassed, between the civil and ecclesiastical powers. These discourses may be regarded as an excellent elementary work on the incontestable rights of all churches; rights which the church of France has preserved with more care than all the others, and which, for this reason, it calls by the modest but improper title of its *liberties*. In the exposition of these precious rights, the author displays the character of a good Frenchman, no less than he has every where else done that of an enlightened historian, and of a zealous Christian, but with a zeal pure, and "according to knowledge."

It is, perhaps, doing an injustice to the excellent discourses which adorn the abbé

Fleury's history, to mention some of them in preference to others. There is not one which does not bear the stamp of the spirit and character of its author, of his knowledge, his equity, his good faith, and the sound judgment with which he distinguishes between the essence of religion, and what constitutes its abuse *.

We ought not to suppress, as a circumstance honourable to the abbé Fleury's modesty, that he long hesitated in undertaking the composition of his Ecclesiastical History. He thought it a labour beyond his strength, and had contented himself with collecting for his own use some materials suitable for such a work, till his friends pressed him to employ them. "I will endeavour then," said he, almost

* It will probably be thought a circumstance greatly creditable to the abbé Fleury's work, that the truly candid Jortin makes large extracts from it in his very valuable "Remarks on Ecclesiastical History." TRANSL.

trembling,

trembling, "to do what you desire." "Doubt not," added Bossuet, "that he is a man to keep his word." Bossuet was not mistaken.

The abbé Fleury had preluded to his Ecclesiastical History by other works not less useful, all of which had for their object the good of religion and of mankind. In that intitled "The Manners of the Israelites and Christians," the first part is an interesting description of the life of the ancient patriarchs, and the manners of the chosen people, whom God seems to have meant to compensate for the contempt of other nations, by making himself more particularly known to them, and by prescribing to them that simple, uniform, and modest way of living, which is the principal source of tranquillity and happiness here below. The second part presents a still more interesting picture of that truly heavenly life which may be spent on earth, by regarding it as the

place of passage through which man is conducted to a better and happier. The portrait of these two conditions, that of the man of reason * and the Christian, is drawn in this work with a simplicity so touching, and a sensibility so sincere and profound, that similar sentiments are communicated to all readers happily disposed to admit them; and even those who have the misfortune (a misfortune more real, perhaps, than they suppose) to be indifferent to both these conditions, cannot see them described without pleasure. They feel, while they read this description, that the author wrote it with an interest which made him happy while he held the pen; and his soul communicates to theirs a sort of calm, disposing them to take the reli-

* This appellation certainly cannot be the abbé Fleury's, who would never suggest that human reason alone could form the character of a people favoured with a revelation expressly designed to distinguish them from the rest of mankind. TRANSL.

gious

gious impression which it is the tendency of the work to form. To this book may be applied the eulogy by which a protestant of an elevated and susceptible soul expressed the effect produced upon him by some truly majestic ceremonies of the church of Rome, which he witnessed in the capital of the Christian world. He had been particularly struck with the noble and affecting spectacle of the pope giving his benediction from the steps of St. Peter's to an immense crowd prostrated in the open space before that church. "At the instant of the benediction," said he, "I felt myself a Catholic *."

The style of this work, like that of the Ecclesiastical History and the author's other productions, is artless, without brilliancy, sometimes even negligent, but always clear and precise. Its negligence even assists its seduction, if such a term

* See NOTE III.

may

may be here applied ; and we may venture to affirm, that this noble neglect is much worthier of the dignity of the subject, than a vain parade of ornament would have been.

The abbé Fleury has written with still greater simplicity his “ Historical Catechism,” and especially the excellent abridgment of this catechism, designed for the instruction of children, which is drawn up with a method and clearness fit to serve as a model for all works of a similar purpose. Some late philosophers have formed the project of a simply moral catechism, for the use of all nations, at all times, and even of all religions, and all men ; that is to say, for the use of children of all ages and places. The best form that could be given to such a catechism is that which the abbé Fleury has given to his, though its object is widely different. This form consists in beginning with a short, clear, and precise exposition of the principles and truths

truths which the author proposes to establish; and afterwards to unfold these truths in a kind of dialogue, by very short questions and very plain answers; so that the catechist may be assured whether the child has comprehended them before he commits them to memory.

In his "Treatise on the Choice and Conduct of Studies," are displayed the same logical precision, the same fund of good sense and reason, which dictated his discourses on ecclesiastical history. The author, however, considered this work only as a sketch and a kind of plan. He acknowledged that "many things were wanting in it;" and, towards the close of his life, he proposed to cast it anew, with great additions. It is to be regretted that his life was not prolonged to these later periods, in which the proper objects for study have been so much canvassed, as indeed they had great occasion to be after so many centuries of ignorance, prejudice,

judice, and servile imitation. The abbé Fleury, supported by the influence of his personal character, and adding to his acquisitions the ideas proper to our age, might perhaps have settled opinion upon the great object of private and public education, the reformation of which is so ardently wished by our philosophers, but meets with so many obstacles from those who are afraid lest the people should become enlightened : an object of high importance, but respecting which, the interests of some, and the doctrines of others, will long raise clouds of doubt, more difficult perhaps to remove than to destroy.

There is another work of the abbé Fleury, less known and read, because it concerns a part of the human race whom it has been too much the custom to despise; this is his "Treatise on the Duty of Masters and Servants." In it he sets forth, as a man and a Christian, the obligations

gations which religion and the laws of society impose on those who have the misfortune of being destined to serve their fellow-men: but while he informs them of their duties, he does not forget their interests. He begins his book with a rigorous declaration of the obligations of masters; as all works written upon the duties of subjects and children ought to begin with those of kings and fathers. Such, in fact, is the injustice of man, and his unhappy propensity to abuse the rights which nature and the laws give him over others, that frequently even the philosopher who believes himself the most humane, the most equitable, the most thoroughly imbued with the principles of natural equality, finds himself culpable, on examination, with regard to those who depend upon him, and sees himself become, if not a tyrant, at least a despot, almost involuntarily and unknowingly *. To speak only

* See NOTE IV.

of masters and servants—how many persons are there, says the abbé Fleury, who reproach princes with thinking themselves of a different species from other men, and yet conduct themselves towards the unfortunate beings under their command, as if they really believed them of another species * ? But what is the most humiliating to human nature is, that inferiors (as our sage and virtuous writer further observes) themselves aid in fostering a prejudice so injurious to them. From those who groan under the compulsory slavery of a tyrant, to those who submit to a voluntary servitude, that part of the human race which obeys and suffers, is strongly inclined to the persuasion that the part which commands and oppresses is really of

* A striking observation, which deserves peculiar attention in this country, where, notwithstanding the equality of its laws, the distance between master and servant is, perhaps, carried as far as any where on the globe ! TRANSL.

a supe-

a superior nature, and formed of a nobler clay.

Talents such as those of the abbé Fleury could not remain in obscurity under a monarch capable of appreciating them, and formed to give them employment. Lewis XIV. named him preceptor to the count of Vermandois *. He had already been preceptor to the princes of Conti, and was finally sub-preceptor to the dukes of Burgundy, Anjou, and Berry†. He was well worthy of being associated with Fenelon in the cares of an education so important to France. It seems to have been conducted upon a different plan from that of the dauphin, and this difference partook of the characters of the masters and pupils. Montausier and Bossuet, firm and austere, found severity and vigour necessary to rouse the sluggish and indolent

* The king's natural son by Madame de la Valiere.

† The king's legitimate grandsons.

disposition

disposition of their disciple. Fenelon and Fleury, mild and moderate, had occasion for patience, guided by consummate prudence, in order to bend the naturally harsh and haughty temper of the duke of Burgundy. It is affirmed that they had the happiness to succeed. If they were not deceived by the appearance of success, he was, perhaps, the first prince in whom education has corrected nature; so much at variance are even the wisest lessons that can be given to these children destined to the government of mankind, with that homage, by which they seem perpetually told that they are gods, and not men; and so prompt and skilful are the flattery and falsehood which besiege them from the cradle, in destroying those principles of humanity and beneficence, with which the best preceptors endeavour to inspire them!

The abbé Fleury lived at court as a sage ought to live who finds himself transplanted into

into a soil not made for him. He breathed the dangerous atmosphere of the place without inhaling its contagion; dividing his time between study and the duties of his office, and ignorant of the intrigues, and almost of the events, of that stormy residence. He even abstained from taking part in those events in which, from his profession, he might peculiarly interest himself. In the matter of quietism, he adopted the doctrine of Bossuet, without losing the friendship of Fenelon. His understanding preserved him from the pious errors of the one, and his moderation from the impetuosity of the other. Both prelates would have done wisely in taking him for the judge and director of their conduct, as they had taken the pope for the arbiter of their doctrines.

Though in his works it is pretty easily seen what were his sentiments on the Jan-
senist disputes which, to the disgrace of
the nation and the age, then threw France

and the church into confusion, yet he does not appear to have entered into the contest. He only exhorted those who interested themselves in it with the most warmth, not to defend the faith at the expence of charity; but he too often found that he preached to the deaf, although he joined to his exhortations what most preachers are apt to neglect, the force of his own example. We know, moreover, that he was not acceptable to the chiefs of the prevailing party, a circumstance not difficult to conceive. His character, the principles diffused through his writings, and especially his conduct, were their perpetual condemnation, which it was not necessary for him to enforce by words. It was to them he had the obligation of seeing his ecclesiastical history put into the prohibited list at Rome; a disgrace rendered honourable by the many great names which have undergone it, and by the reputation it confers, in the opinion of
of

of all good judges, who, while they respect christianity as the work of God, know how to separate from it the additions of men *.

Lewis XIV. had given him the abbey of Loc Dieu as a recompence for educating the count de Vermandois. When he had completed the education of the duke of Burgundy, the priory of Argenteuil became vacant. Wearied with the court, though he was neither an actor, nor even an observer, but a mere spectator in it,

* It appears that, at the present day, not only the court of Rome; but almost every absolute court in Europe, has its *prohibited list* by which it hopes to exclude all opinions and all information, not suitable to its political views. This is, at best, a policy of very dubious effect; since it is certain that the Roman list has rather served the purpose of pointing out worthy objects of curiosity to men of reading, than that of warning them against dangerous topics of inquiry. Enforced, indeed, by the strong hand of power, these prohibitions may have some temporary effect in countries of little intercourse; and temporary effect is all that despotism looks to. TRANSL.

he longed for the period of quitting it. He wished to possess this benefice, which, by its proximity to Paris, offered a commodious retreat for study, without removing him from those sources of assistance and information which his modesty suggested to be requisite. He obtained without difficulty what he asked; but as a strict observer of the canons, he resigned his abbacy. He did not think himself authorised to keep two benefices on the usual pretext of *the decencies of his station*, nor even on that of distributing among the poor the patrimony of the church by becoming the usufructuary of a property which belongs to them. His example may teach those ecclesiastics of high reputation, who have the interests of religion so often in their mouths, that the most efficacious mean of impressing it on others, is to practise its laws and maxims, by beginning with exercising on themselves the strictness which they profess in their principles, and proving

proving the sincerity of their faith and zeal, by the sanctity of their lives *.

The French academy admitted the abbé Fleury among its members when he was sub-preceptor to the royal children †. The title of academician is, as it were, attached to this function, because it is supposed that so important an employment is always given to distinguished merit, which, in fact, has several times been the case. But literary honours were made to be offered to such a man as the abbé Fleury, without requiring the passport of a sub-preceptor's place. This worthy associate loved our occupations, and assisted at our meetings, as much as his duties and fondness for retirement permitted him. He acted as director at various admissions, and acquitted himself with a dignity enhanced by his natural simplicity. In the eulogy of Massillon we have

* See NOTE V.

† On July 16, 1696.

recorded two remarkable passages in the discourse made by the abbé on admitting that prelate. It will appear that on this occasion he seemed to forget the interest of the academy which he loved, in favour of that of the church which he loved still more ; and that while he made use of all the forms of academical politeness, he was eager to send into his diocese a bishop whom no reason could keep at a distance from it. He carried still further the strictness of his principles on residence. He thought it wrong that prelates, whose first duty, according to him, was preaching the gospel to their flock, should suppose themselves exempted from this obligation by employments even purely ecclesiastical, which simple priests could fill as well as they. " The place of a bishop," said he, " is in his diocese, and nowhere else." We here act only as faithful narrators of his opinions, without choosing either to combat the principles of so pious a man,

or,

or, by approving them, to run the risk of offending any one.

The abbé Fleury, who, by inculcating reverence on the eloquent Maffillon, had sacrificed the academy to the church, was not, however, the less attached to our society, and testified his zeal for its honour on an occasion with which few are acquainted. A seat which became vacant was requested by a person who has since acquired a name among the members *. A powerful competitor declared himself. The man of letters, conforming to a kind of custom, the reason of which is not very apparent, did not venture to contend against so formidable a rival, and went to inform the abbé Fleury, then director, that he withdrew his petition. The abbé calmly represented to this timid candidate,

* The president Henault. He became an academician some years afterwards. The fact is told from his own authority.

that so much eagerness to *yield* a place of which he was not, and perhaps never would be in possession, was real pride disguised under the name of moderation; and that the men of letters, for whom the academy was principally designed, and who form its chief existence, ought not to resign to any persons whatever the claims they might have upon it. He then took leave of his visitor, assuring him with all possible politeness, that he should never have his vote.

After the death of Lewis XIV. the requisitions of the state and church again obliged him to quit his retreat. He was chosen confessor to the young successor to the crown. All France saw with approbation the conscience of the royal child entrusted to the most enlightened, the mildest, and the most prudent director, who, besides, being attached to no public body, had neither prejudices to sustain, interests

interests to consider, nor ambitious pretensions to make good, and who, being of no party, was respected by all. "I thought it right" said the regent, who knew mankind, "to nominate the abbé Fleury to this post, because he is neither Jansenist, Molinist, nor Ultramontaine."

His infirmities, however, obliged him to resign this important office a few years before his death. Intrigue is said to have been an additional cause; and we may be assured that it would meet with small resistance from such a man*.

Though almost entirely devoted to ecclesiastical studies and writings, he had not totally abandoned the cultivation of polite literature. At the conclusion of his "Treatise on Studies" are two Latin epistles, in which he seems to have intended an imitation of the manner of those of Horace, and with tolerable suc-

* See NOTE VI.

cess. Literary *pasticcios* * of this kind are neither rare nor wonderful. Bossuet, too, is said to have written a fable in the style and verse of Phædrus, which might pass for a composition of that poet. This facility in putting on a fictitious personage, when appearing in men who possess eminent talents and a manner of their own, is only an additional merit, and announces a flexibility of genius, capable of bending itself to anything. But with respect to those who have no other merit than the talent of counterfeiting, they may be ranked with the painter Sebastian Ricci, who had the faculty of perfectly imitating Paul Veronese, though his original performances fell very short of that degree of excellence. "Always," said one of his brother-artists, "paint Paul Veroneses, " and never Riccis."

* An Italian term, applied to a picture, in which the artist has endeavoured to imitate the style of some particular master.

The talents of the abbé Fleury were not limited to literature; they also comprehended the fine arts. The plates in his "Historical Catechism" were engraved after his designs. He had taste, and even a kind of genius for this art, of which he spoke with pleasure, and recommended the acquirement to youth. He had formed a collection of fashions in use among the French, drawn by himself with much care; and he usefully employed the knowledge he had gained in history and design, to give a clearer conception of his ideas to the famous engraver Sebastian le Clerc, who executed the vignettes of his "Ecclesiastical History." This has caused the costume to be so well kept in them. The merit of the abbé Fleury in this point appeared to us worthy of being remarked in a writer so much occupied with severe studies, extremely foreign to the fine arts.

Here we shall close his eulogy, though we are very far from having exhausted his merits.

merits. One of his other works, however, at least deserves an honourable mention, which is his “Institute of Ecclesiastical Law,” praised by able jurists, commented upon by some, and even honoured with the encomiums of chancellor d’Aguesseau, whose name is so dear to the state, and to letters. This work is admired for the same precision, the same method, the same clearness, which bestow so much value on the author’s other productions. These qualities in him proceeded from the *philosophic spirit* which he possessed in a supreme degree. We fear not, in speaking of the abbé Fleury, to employ an expression which might be suspected in the eulogy of many others. We would wish to accustom those who proscribe it with so much bitterness, sometimes at least to hear it calmly, and not themselves to discredit the *spirit of religion* by shewing, from their impolitic repugnance to the *spirit of philosophy*, that they judge the two to be incompatible. An evident proof that the supposed ene-

mies of religion are only the enemies of political devotion and fanaticism, is that the writers among us who are so violently accused of being philosophers, render all due justice to the works of the abbé Fleury : they read, they esteem, they praise these excellent works, because they perceive in every line that the author's zeal for religion is pure, simple, and by no means acted, like that of so many others ; because they see that it is a prudent enlightened zeal, tending to free Christianity from the superstitions which degrade it, and the mad party spirit which lacerates it ; in fine, because they observe in all his works that character of peace, lenity and moderation, which is so remote from the violences of intolerant hypocrisy. The abbé Fleury died on July 14, 1723.

NOTES

TO THE

EULOGY OF THE ABBE' FLEURY.

NOTE 1.

IN the History of the Council of Constance, by l'Enfant, may be found the long debates excited in this synod of Christendom, by the scandalous assertions of the cordelier John Petit, relative to the assassination of the duke of Orleans by the duke of Burgundy; the obstacles interposed by several fathers of the council, assisted by several monks and theologians, to their condemnation; and the time, activity, vigour, and patience, which the celebrated

Gerfon

Gerson was obliged to employ, in order to procure a decision from the assembled church, that every assassination is a crime. The abominable doctrine which the council of Constance so long hesitated to proscribe, is the same which afterwards produced the mad violences of the League, and plunged the poniard in the bosom of the best of our kings,

We have already mentioned the little favour shewn by this council to the court of Rome. Its decisions on this head are well known ; but there is one determination less so, which deserves our notice. It was proposed to the fathers of Constance, to establish some extraordinary annates in favour of the Roman church, in order to support it " in its due splendour." The fathers replied, that it was only requisite to put the lands of the Campagna of Rome into a productive state, which would abundantly supply the wants of the church. Hence it appears that these lands
in

In the pope's territories were at that time in a very neglected condition, and unfortunately they have continued to be so to our times ;—a melancholy, but necessary effect (say the Protestants) of the sacerdotal government. For the honour of the sovereign pontiffs, we would believe this assertion of the Protestants less dictated by reason, than by ill-humour against the holy see *.

NOTE II.

How well merited soever be the reproaches made to Lewis XIV. on account of the persecution of the Protestants, this fundamentally just, but misguided prince,

* Many of the popes have made spirited efforts towards accomplishing the difficult task of draining the vast tract of marsh which composes the Campagna ; and, in particular, the late unfortunate Pius VI. carried on prodigious works there, which he himself inspected with great assiduity, and brought to completion. TRANSL.

is much more excusable than a pious and holy bishop of the last century, (whom, through regard to his memory, we shall not name, though the journalists of *Trevoux* have not blushed to quote him with encomium,) for having had the misfortune to advance, in one of his works, “ that it
 “ is charity to decry as much as possible
 “ the enemies of God and the church,
 “ such as heretics and schismatics, whom
 “ our Saviour treats as false prophets and
 “ ravenous wolves ;” to which the same journalists charitably add, that this conduct is conformable to the authority of scripture, and the example of the most holy personages. See *Mem. de Trevoux*, November 1723, p. 2089.

NOTE III.

THE celebrated Protestant, Christopher Ranzonius, was at Rome during the jubilee of 1650. After having observed every thing with the prepossessions usual to those of his communion, he thus wrote to a friend, who was also a Protestant:—

“ You imagined I should be shocked at
 “ the superstitions, puerilities, and frivolous novelties which Rome could not
 “ fail of presenting ; but, contrary to my
 “ expectation, the reverse has happened.
 “ At the commencement of the jubilee announced by the pope to the Christian world, I beheld in the centre of the
 “ Catholic church a spectacle which recalled to mind the piety of the early
 “ ages. I saw advance towards the cathedral of the Vatican a multitude of
 “ children, modest as angels, swarms of
 “ monks and hermits, fraternities of men
 “ and women, various colleges and parishes ;

“ fishes ; the pontiff, followed by his
 “ clergy, surrounded by a great number
 “ of prelates ; the Christian people,
 “ marching in a crowd after their chief
 “ and pastor, but with a fervour so strik-
 “ ing, that they seemed desirous of taking
 “ heaven, by holy violence. I confess
 “ that this novelty renewed in my me-
 “ mory the piety of the first believers.”
 We do not find that Ranzonius, after
 writing this letter, became a Catholic :
 probably because he was still more scan-
 dalized at the irregularities of the court of
 Rome, than edified by the ceremonies of
 the church ; and that the signora Olimpia,
 the declared mistress of the reigning pope,
 Innocent X., lamentably injured the sanc-
 tity of that religion of which this pontiff
 was the head *.

* The effects produced upon Protestant travellers
 by the splendid ceremonies of the church of Rome,
 have been very different, according to the temper of
 mind with which they have been viewed. Some per-

NOTE IV.

Two philosophers were travelling together for their pleasure. The postillions, according to the right given them by the post, which certainly is only that of the strongest, turned out of the road all the

sons of lively fancy, and little serious reflection on the subject, have been greatly captivated with the grandeur and solemnity of the spectacles, enhanced by music, painting, and all that can be done by outward show to impress the feelings. Others, strongly impressed with abhorrence and contempt of all pious frauds and hypocritical mummeries, have viewed the whole with no other emotions than those of disgust. Without deciding which of these is the most desirable frame of mind on the immediate occasion, it may safely be asserted, that a permanent conversion effected by such means indicates great weakness of understanding; since the least reflection must suggest, that power and riches may produce a like theatrical display under any system of religious opinion, and that grave hypocrites, or enthusiasts, may every where be found for the actors. TRANSL.

carriages

carriages they met, even those which were loaded with the most useful commodities.

"Alas ! my friend," said one of the philosophers to the other, "we exclaim against tyranny, and we are here setting an example in its favour : we are furnished with a little momentary authority, and we abuse it." His friend assented to the remark ; and the two philosophers drove on, letting the postillions do as they thought fit.

NOTE V.

DESPREAUX took a pleasure in relating, on the subject of plurality of benefices, a conversation which he had with an ecclesiastic, who having begun with being as indigent as the apostles, joined the poet at that time in his declamations against this *violation of the laws of the church*. The scrupulous abbé assured Despréaux, that if he had only an abbacy of a thousand crowns, it would terminate his ambition,

and that nothing in the world should induce him to take a single step to become richer. Soon after this edifying resolution, he obtained an abbacy of seven thousand livres ; and the following winter, one of eight thousand became vacant, which he asked and obtained. While he had “ the wind in his poop,” (this was his expression,) a priory of six thousand livres fell, and was also given to this disinterested, easily satisfied priest. Despréaux now could not help expressing his surprise. “ Ah !” said the abbé, “ if you knew “ how comfortable this is to live upon !” — “ That may be,” answered Despréaux, “ but to die with, Monsieur l’abbé, to die “ with !” We shall only add, to finish the picture, that this ecclesiastic, so happily cured of his scruples, was a great convertor of heretics, and valued himself much upon being so.

NOTE VI.

It would now be useless to conceal, that the Jesuits, expelled from Versailles for their cabals and machinations after the death of Lewis XIV. and having set every engine at work to procure their recall to court, were the authors of the intrigue which deprived the abbé Fleury of the direction of the conscience of the young king. If this kind of disgrace, or rather deliverance from an oppressive burden, did not afflict the respectable confessor, it, however, excited the public indignation against the Jesuit Daubenton, confessor of Philip V. This man had influence enough to cause his penitent to require from the French court, that the young king should, like himself, chuse a Jesuit for his director; and, what appears incredible, he even pre-

vailed to have this *secret article* inserted in the treaty of peace between France and Spain in 1720, as a condition essential to the re-establishment of a good understanding between the two crowns. It was the same Daubenton who, three or four years afterwards, revealed to the regent the king of Spain's confession: the king coolly shewed to his confessor the regent's letter informing him of the fact: the Jesuit fainted away, and died in two days.

It is impossible without indignation to recollect the insolence of the Jesuit Nitard, confessor to the queen of Spain, the mother of Charles II. and who, during this queen's regency, governed the kingdom despotically. One of the first Spanish grandees, whom this monk treated with haughtiness, complained of the violation of the respect due to his rank. "It is you," replied the Jesuit, "who owe *me* respect;—me, who every day have your God in my hands, "
 " and

“ and your queen at my feet *.” He was at length compelled to leave Spain, loaded with the public execrations. The poor queen, his penitent, wrote to him, “ Father confessor, I trust in the mercy of God, that he will manifest your innocence, and maintain my authority.”

The king of Sardinia, Victor Amadeus, often related to a very respectable Frenchman, that a Jesuit of great worth, to whom he had given his confidence and esteem, requested him on his death-bed, through an emotion of gratitude, never to take a man of his habit for confessor. Can we, after this, lament the proscription of a society which has made religion, politics,

* This, addressed to a Catholic, was no vain boast; and it is an irrefragable proof of the incurably dangerous nature of the Romish religion, that, from system, it justifies such monstrous claims to superiority in its priests.

and

and the weakness of sovereigns, subservient to their unbridled ambition? A prelate who deplored their fate in a funeral oration for Lewis XV. compared them to the prophet Jonas thrown overboard to appease the tempest. Happy will it be for people and sovereigns, if these Jonases meet with no whale to give them refuge and restore them to life! It is true that, amidst the merited severity with which the body was treated, its members ought to have experienced the humanity to which every citizen is entitled, and which would have rendered the rigour practised towards the society more just and reputable. This would have been the case, as some of the Jesuits have confessed to one another, if they had been demolished by philosophers; "but unfortunately," say they, "our destruction has been effected by Jansenists alone." They would speak more truly

were

were they to say, that philosophy silently prepared the way for their fall; that the jansenists founded the charge, and that justice consummated the work. He who writes these reflections has the better claim to impartiality, as he never had personal cause to complain of the society. He is of opinion that it has been useful to letters, baneful to the church, dangerous to the state, strict in manners, and relaxed in doctrine, a weak friend and implacable enemy, and animated by a fanaticism which still subsists among its dispersed members. Hence a philosopher, surveying on the one hand the facility with which the society was destroyed, and on the other, the mischiefs of which the Ex-jesuits are still the authors, has said, “ that he had
 “ never seen a body so easy to kill, and so
 “ difficult to put to death ; and that it resembled those worms cut in pieces, the
 “ parts of which still live and move
 “ for

“ for a long time, making efforts to re-
“ join *.”

* Many circumstances at the present moment seem to prove the justness of the preceding observations. Should the 19th century commence with the revival of the order of Jesuits, an event certainly meditated by some of the warm friends of church power, it will be impossible to foretel the degree of retrogradation in light and liberty which the close of it may witness.

TRANSL.

EULOGY
OF
DESTOUCHES*.

PHILIP NERICAULT DESTOUCHES was born at Tours in 1680, of a reputable family in that city. Though we are ignorant of the history of his early years, there is reason to suppose that they were very tempestuous, though, in truth, rather through his parents' fault than his own. This is a reproach seldom applied to themselves by parents, though not seldom merited. Those of Destouches destined him for the long robe, but Nature opposed this destination. She had given him talents for literature, of which she demanded the

* Read August 25, 1776.

disposal.

disposal. His parents were the less justified in requiring sacrifices in their favour, as they had no right to look upon their son's genius as their gift. He chose rather to obey Nature than them; but wishing neither to give scandal by braving the respectable authority they abused, nor slavishly to submit to it, he made his escape from that paternal mansion which he would have desired never to quit. It is thus that the tyranny of fathers sometimes produces in families the same disorder that despotism does in states, by compelling the victims of oppression to break the dear and sacred ties which attached them to lawful power. Destouches, freed from persecution, but without support or asylum, soon felt all the burden of a liberty which left him no resource. Urged by the necessity of a livelihood, he entered into a provincial company of players. We not only feel no hesitation in relating this very pardonable act of his youth, but we relate it

as doing honour to his memory. The elevated sentiments he displayed in so forlorn a situation, shed round his fault that interest which is always inspired by a noble soul struggling against injustice and misfortune. Drawn by his fate into a profession which he saw severely condemned by respected characters, and convinced that their inflexible austerity would allow him no credit for being at the same time a comedian and a man of virtue, he had however the courage to oppose the cruel decree issued against his condition, by an exemplary decency of manners, though he could expect no other reward for his conduct, than the conduct itself. Virtue never has a greater claim to our homage than when it appears in all its purity without even daring to flatter itself with obtaining a little esteem—the only external advantage of which vice has not hitherto entirely deprived it!

Destouches

Destouches having for a long time dragged his wretchedness from town to town, was at length manager of a company of comedians at Soleure, when the marquis de Puyfieux, embassador from France to Switzerland, obtained some knowledge of him by means of an harangue which the young actor made him at the head of his comrades. This discourse, replete with ingenious and delicate turns, was far from resembling those insipid compliments which men in place are so often condemned to hear, and which they regard as a kind of tax upon the dignity of their station. The marquis de Puyfieux, habituated by his diplomatic function to discern and appreciate characters, judged that one who could speak so well, was destined by nature to something better than the representation of French comedies in the centre of Switzerland. He requested a conference with Destouches, sounded him on various

various topics, and found in this provincial actor a man well informed, enlightened, superior to his harangue, and still more, to his condition. He asked him if he could without reluctance quit a profession, which he seemed to have embraced only because he could not help it, for more serious and solid occupations. Destouches, as may be supposed, did not hesitate in his answer. The ambassador attached him to his own person, and formed him to business. His generous protection was soon repaid by the rapid progress made by his disciple in so excellent a school; and by means of the court-favours he obtained for him, he had the pleasure of compensating an estimable man for the injuries he had undergone from his family and from fortune*.

From the time of his abode in Switzerland, Destouches began to write verses. He even exercised his muse on topics seldom tempting to young versifiers, those

* See NOTE I.

of religion; and he submitted these christian and poetical productions to the judgment of the formidable Despréaux. It will perhaps be not uninteresting to peruse one of the answers of his oracle, were it only for the singularity of its manner. “ Were I, Sir, in perfect health,
 “ I would endeavour, by replying at length
 “ to your magnificent compliment, to
 “ shew you that I can return hyperbole
 “ for hyperbole, and that letters so witty
 “ and polite as yours are not written to
 “ me with impunity. Permit me, how-
 “ ever, without making a trial of wit with
 “ you, simply to assure you that I have
 “ found in your work sentiments of re-
 “ ligion, the more estimable, as I believe
 “ them sincere, and that you write as you
 “ think. But, Sir, since you wish me to
 “ write with that satirical liberty which I
 “ have acquired, justly or unjustly, on
 “ Parnassus, how can I suffer that so ac-
 “ complished a man should make *terre*
 “ rhyme

"rhime to *colere*? How can I pass over
 "two such ellipses as you venture upon?
 "How —— but I perceive that instead of
 "the thanks I owe you, I am going to
 "overwhelm you with criticism. It will
 "therefore be best to conclude, by en-
 "couraging you in your good intention
 "of ascending the forked mountain, and
 "gathering there the laurels which in-
 "fallibly await you."

The faults which Despréaux, with so
 laboured a civility, points out in the verses
 sent him, seem to prove that the young
 poet did not as yet raise brilliant expecta-
 tions by his attempts. But his critic only
 shewed the more penetration in foreseeing
 his future success, provided that on this
 occasion he spoke, as Destouches did on
 religious subjects, *as he thought*.

However this were, Destouches was not
 long in verifying the prediction, whether
 ironical or sincere. His peculiar talent
 began to display itself in Switzerland, by a

comedy which was not unworthy to have been produced in a land more sensible to the pleasures of the theatre. It was the "Curieux Impertinent," (Impertinently Curious,) which was played and received with transport throughout the country *. But the author would have been but moderately proud of the enthusiasm of the thirteen Cantons, had not their suffrage been confirmed by the very favourable reception the same piece soon after met with on the French stage. At Paris, however, it underwent the fate inevitable to all successful works. It was criticised, and even was honoured with some epigrams. One of these honestly shewed that its purpose was not to censure the piece, but to amuse by a play of words. Its two last lines contain this turn, that he who should see the play but once, could be called only *curious*, but that he who saw it a second time would fulfil its whole title.

* Taken from the novel of this title in Don Quixote.

Destouches made the proper reply to the epigrammatist, by his success in a new comedy, that of "l'Ingrat" (the Ungrateful Man). He was the more worthy to treat this subject, as, notwithstanding the severities of his father, he had not forgotten that he was indebted to him for life and education; and some years after, he gave the most honourable proof of his detestation of ingratitude, by sending to this father, then burthened with a numerous family, the sum of 40,000 livres, the fruit of his industry and economy—an action which in the golden age (if it ever existed except in fable) might have appeared simply natural, but which is unfortunately become praise-worthy in an age which exhibits few of a like kind. But what honours the father still more than the son, is that the old man, with tears in his eyes, confessed the injustice he had been guilty of towards him—an uncommon and almost heroical confession

in an aged parent ! He acknowledged that his son, in resisting his narrow and tyrannical views, had been wiser than he ; and that this fortunate resistance was the source of that happiness and peace which his son's success and beneficence was about to shed on his latter days. The son, at this instant still happier than the father, was consoled by this tender acknowledgement, for all the sufferings of his youth.

The public, while rendering justice to "the Ungrateful Man" in detail, objected to the leading character as too odious. This, however, is not the real fault of the comedy, for Moliere's "Tartuffe" is a part not less odious, and yet is the masterpiece of the theatre. But, hypocrisy, while rendered an object of detestation by its mask, is at the same time an object of ridicule from the transparency of that mask ; of which it is so sensible, that, upon detection, it is secretly more tormented with the idea of being despised than hated :
ingra-

ingratitude, on the contrary, not attempting to disguise itself, represses laughter by the indignation it excites; and hence offers little scope to the comic poet, whose business is more to inspire contempt than hatred for vice. Destouches felt the truth of this principle, and never deviated from it in his other pieces. The aversion which the bad inspire (said he) may flatter their vanity, because this aversion is a-kin to fear: the surest way of discouraging them, is to humiliate them by ridicule. This virtuous writer was only apprehensive (and at the present day he would be still more so) that vice would soon become insusceptible of humiliation, in the midst of so many who either display it boldly, or view it with indifference, and some of whom have lost the habit of blushing, others, of feeling indignation, at it.

To the comedy of "l'Ingrat" succeeded that of "l'Irrésolu," which was at first coolly received, but being afterwards cor-

rected by its author, and, besides, being written with care, and supported by some comic situations, still occasionally makes its appearance on the stage. Every-body recollects the last line, in which the "Irresolute Man," after finally chusing for wife one of the two women between whom he has fluctuated through the whole piece, says,

J'aurois mieux fait, je crois, d'épouser Celimene ;
Perhaps, after all, the best match was the other.

This is one of those strokes which it gives pleasure to repeat, which alone are worth a whole part, and which, natural as they seem, are much more uncommon in our modern comedies than entire scenes of jargon without genius, and extravagance without gaiety.

"Le Medisant" (the Backbiter) which, when new, was better received than "l'Irrésolu," and therefore honoured with more satires, has also kept its place
on

on the stage. Another comedy, indeed, of nearly the same subject, "le Mechant," written so superiorly, and one, of which our comic theatre in its penury and decline may justly boast, has rendered the public cool with respect to "le Medisant," which has since appeared but rarely and less advantageously; still, the other has not entirely consigned it to oblivion, which is no small praise in a country where the national decrees are not always founded on strict justice.

Destouches was thus proceeding from one success to another on the comic theatre, when he was obliged to renounce, at least for a time, the triumphs he still had in expectation. The Regent, whose friendship and esteem he had obtained, not by the servilities of a courtier, but by his probity and intelligence in business, sent him to England in 1717 with the abbé Dubois, since cardinal and minister. He resided six years in London, where, after the unprecedented

precedented fortune of Dubois, he remained sole foreign minister for France *. He acquitted himself so well, that on his return, the regent, in presence of the whole court, gave him the highest encomiums, and promised him (these were his own words) " to give him proofs of his satisfaction which should astonish him and the whole kingdom." This prince, sufficiently lax in his morals and principles, but of an understanding equally correct and elevated, was far from concurring in that apophthegm so often repeated by folly in power, that a talent for business is incompatible with one for literature. He had the simplicity to believe that abilities are useful in all cases; and that perhaps more genius is not required to succeed in a negotiation, often favoured by circumstances, than to compose a good work, in which success must solely depend upon the writer's talents. He had lately witnessed

* See NOTE II.

that

that an English poet, the celebrated Prior, had by the wisest measures prepared the way for the peace of Utrecht, so much wished for by the people, and so long retarded by the manœuvres or the incapacity of politicians. He knew that Francis I., after he had taken a resolution worthy of himself, to employ as his ministers in foreign courts men of learning and knowledge, had conducted his affairs much more prudently than at the beginning of his reign, when he chose for ambassadors the companions of his pleasures. In fine, the duke of Orleans, justified by the success Destouches had already met with, perhaps imagined that this philosophical observer, long occupied in painting human life on the stage, and obliged to study men assiduously in order to give truth to his pictures, was thereby rendered peculiarly fit for a station in which the knowledge of mankind is the most indispensable qualification. Destouches, still better satisfied with having well served his country

country, than flattered with the prince's good opinion, waited patiently the effect of his promises, without doing any thing to accelerate it. But his hopes, if he had any, vanished on the death of the Regent, which happened not long afterwards. Without regret he saw all the prospects of a well-merited fortune fade away. He found, not a consolation, which he did not need, but a compensation well suited to his taste, in the practice of that philosophy which had never forsaken him in the hurry of business, or amid the seductions of court-favour. He purchased a small estate near Melun, where he lived so tranquil and happy, that government having wished to draw him from his retreat in order to send him to Petersburg with the honourable title of minister of France to the czar, Peter the Great, he did not hesitate to refuse the offer. He refused it, however, like a true sage, equally without ostentation and effort, preferring the pleasure of cultivating his garden to the honour of acting
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the man of consequence at the distance of eight hundred leagues *. This, indeed, was not the real temptation afforded by that vast empire to one like him. It was the rare spectacle Russia then presented to enlightened eyes ; — knowledge, which everywhere else has ascended from subjects to sovereigns, there descending from the sovereign to the subjects ; these subjects, whom long barbarism had so far degraded as to make them fond of it, endeavouring to retain over their eyes the bandage which the monarch was tearing off ; superstition and ignorance destroyed by the same force which has rooted them in so many other countries — by the most absolute and severe despotism † ; in fine,

* See NOTE III.

† Can it with any justice be said that superstition and ignorance were in fact destroyed in Russia by Peter I. ? Have they been so since, even under Catherine II. ? Is there any present probability of their destruction ? Alas ! despotism never can be the instrument to effect this desirable revolution — free government itself can scarcely effect it. TRANSL.
 the

the political birth of a great people, unknown during many ages, and destined soon to avenge themselves, by a formidable existence, of the oblivion to which the rest of Europe had hitherto consigned them. Destouches might have studied this nation as a philosopher : he acted the philosopher still more by preferring liberty and retirement.

Before his retreat, Destouches had been admitted into the French Academy, (on August 25, 1723,) an honour the more merited, as his dramatic laurels, instead of withering on his head at the end of a few months, like those of so many others, had been rendered more flourishing by time. The pit too, then less indulgent, did not, as now, extend their favour to every effort; plaudits were neither at the command, nor at the purchase of authors ; and the Academy, by adopting Destouches, did no more than unite its suffrage to that of truly enlightened judges, which in its eyes is the genuine touchstone of the public esteem,

not

not to be confounded with the reputations conferred by private circles and literary journals, which are doomed to languish and die within the narrow limits of their birth.

Our new academician employed the leisure of his solitude in confirming, by new productions, the title he had acquired to literary celebrity. The first fruit of his labours was "the Married Philosopher," the success of which was almost unexampled. He drew the subject from his own family. While in England, he had married an amiable woman; but the union required secrecy, and it was violated. In accommodating this circumstance to the stage, Destouches added all that might render it amusing: the retribution made to love and marriage by a philosopher, who, after long braving both, at length submits to wear their chains in secret; his fears lest his captivity, dear though it be to his heart, should be publicly known; the
rude

rude fallies of a financier, uncle to the philosopher, who highly disapproves his nephew's engagement, because it déranges those pecuniary plans he has laid for settling him advantageously, and making him rich, without caring whether he made him happy ; and, lastly, the new and original, though episodical, part of a fantastical and capricious woman, who is yet in love as much as a capricious woman can be, and who gives life and action to the piece, and produces various comic situations. This character also the author found in his own family. He sketched it after a sister-in-law, whose fantastic humour supplied him with the most pleasant features of the portrait ; but he took great care, as may be supposed, to conceal the matter from his model. The sister-in-law was eager to attend the first representation of the comedy, little suspecting that she had the honour of being one of the principal personages of the drama. The portrait was

so

so resembling, that she at once recognised it, and, flying into a violent rage, bitterly reproached her perfidious kinsman, and loudly expressed her grief in having been so unfortunate as to marry into the family of a poet. She at length moderated the tone of her anger, through an apprehension lest the incorrigible poet should find in it matter for some new comic scene, and again divert the public at her expence.

Some years afterwards, Destouches produced "*le Glorieux*," (the Vain-glorious Man, or Boaster,) which received extraordinary applause. This it deserved, by the variety and natural air of its characters, the contrast of situations, the dignified comedy which reigns through the piece, and the pathetic scenes intermixed with this comedy, and which, instead of producing an unpleasant medley, infuse a kind of elevation into the piece, notwithstanding the gaiety of its general subject.

It may be added, to the author's praise, that "le Glorieux" is the first comedy into which the pathetic, apparently so foreign to this species of composition, has been successfully introduced. Moliere seems to have neglected this advantage, even where it naturally presented itself; as in the "Tartuffe," where the distressing situation of a worthy family, about to become victims to a villain, would have supplied this great painter with scenes replete with interest and eloquence. His reason for rejecting this opportunity of displaying his powers was, doubtless, the fear of weakening, by sentiments of tenderness, that profound sense of hatred which he wished to concentrate on the principal personage *. Destouches, whose object in his

* The reason here suggested is by no means a good one, since it would apply against the tender pathetic in tragedy also, where indignation against villainy is meant to be excited. Moliere, probably, had

his "Glorieux" was not to excite this violent passion, the extinguisher of all the rest, had the merit of perceiving all the advantage he could derive from mixing that interest which draws forth tears, with the effect of the ridiculous. So happily, indeed, has he in this piece melted and blended together the pathetic and the comic, that the "Glorieux" affords at the same time the epoch of this new species of writing, and the model of that skill and proportion which is necessary for the success of so hazardous a combination. Authors, in other respects very estimable, who have followed the steps of Destouches, instead of imitating him in making pathos subordinate to that gaiety which is so essential to true comedy, have given the

had received it as a general maxim, that comedy had no business with the pathetic; and indeed this emotion, in any high degree, seems scarcely compatible with the full effect of the ludicrous. *TRANSL.*

first part to the pathetic, and the second only to the comic, which it can seldom fill advantageously ; for if it is difficult to excite compassion along with laughter, it is still more so to excite laughter in the midst of tears. Hence this pleasing gaiety, so well sustained by Destouches, but to which his successors have substituted only a forced and studied smile, has at length almost entirely disappeared from our theatre, to make way for a mere domestic drama ; an undefined and equivocal species of composition, which has, indeed, the advantage of exciting in us an interest nearer to our own bosoms, but which is subject to the evil (a greater evil than is apprehended) of the extreme facility of attaining mediocrity in it ; for which reason it ought neither to be forbidden to good writers, nor encouraged in others.

To the uncommon merit of having opened a new career, the "Glorieux" adds that of having rendered several of its lines proverbial,

proverbial, which is the highest honour a verse in comedy can obtain. Some of them even, by a noble pathos of expression, deserve to rank among the sublime strokes of the French theatre. Criticism, however, which levies its tribute upon an author with a rigour proportioned to his wealth and success, charged the principal character, that of the *Glorieux*, with a degree of exaggeration; and what appears in some measure to justify this censure, is that the modest, and consequently estimable personage whom the author means to contrast with his *Glorieux*, almost touches upon the ridiculous through the excess of his modesty. For an infallible rule to make sure of the effect of a dramatic character, is to examine that of its foil; because these two personages having to keep a parallel course, though at a great distance from each other, it is almost impossible that if one passes the bounds of truth, the other should not do so likewise. It is the more difficult to

avoid this fault, as the pictures designed for the theatre, being to be viewed at a certain distance, require a firm and decided style of painting, in which the artist is apt to mistake caricature for strength. Nothing is so rare as to catch on the stage that point of dramatic perspective, in which the perfection of the resemblance results from a just proportion between the force of the pencil, and the distance at which the portrait is to be viewed.

If Destouches was to blame in making a little alteration in the two principal parts of his *pièce*, he had much to plead in his excuse. The plan of the comedy as he had first conceived, and even executed it, was very different from that which singular and unforeseen circumstances obliged him to adopt. In the original draught, the *Glorieux* was punished for his pride, by seeing his mistress married to his rival, whom the author had made a plain worthy man, without any tincture of the ridiculous.

lous. But the actor who was to represent the *Glorieux**, and who was the more fitted for the part, as he acted it in his private capacity, thought himself degraded by this humiliating termination, and declared that he would never consent to personate a dismissed and punished lover†. The author was compelled to sacrifice the perfection of his work to the caprice of this actor and the necessity of engaging his assistance; and with pain he disfigured the piece in order to have it played as he wished. It was, indeed, not only by this actor, but by all the rest, played with a perfection which will be long remembered at the French theatre. It has been said of some other pieces, that the parts were made for the actors; in this, the actors seemed made for their parts. If the complaints of writers are to be credited, a player has more than once forced them

* Quinault Dufrené.

† See NOTE IV.

thus to mutilate their works, without so well recompencing them for the sacrifice.

These repeated successes of Destouches were the more flattering to him, as they were neither terminated nor weakened by those of a formidable rival who about the same time shone upon the stage, the celebrated Dufresny. Each was distinguished by different and nearly opposite qualities. Destouches, natural and just, without ever being ignoble or negligent ; Dufresny, original and new, without ceasing to be natural ; the one, attaching himself to the more prominent objects of ridicule ; the other seizing the more remote ; the pencil of Destouches more equal and chastised ; that of Dufresny more inventive and free ; the first, drawing the whole figure with more regularity ; the second, giving bolder features and a more lively expression ; Destouches, more studied in his plans, more intelligent in the entire composition ; Dufresny, animating his irregular
and

and loosely connected plots with striking scenes; the author of the "Glorieux" equally pleasing the multitude and the connoisseurs; his rival exciting the mirth of the multitude only after the connoisseurs had set the example of laughing: in fine, each filling a place at the theatre appropriate and personal to himself; Dufresny, by a happy mixture of fire and delicacy, by a species of gaiety entirely his own and unstudied, by a style which always awakes the attention, though it cannot be taken for a model, and which is neither to be censured nor imitated; Destouches, by a chastity of composition and portraiture which does not diminish the vivacity of his draughts, by an air of virtue and decency spread over even his most comic parts, by the skill of connecting and contrasting his scenes, and by the still greater art of exciting at the same time laughter and tears, laughter of which the spectator does

not

not repent, and tears which do not sur-
prize him.

To crown the glory of these two rivals there was only wanting a kind of merit, of all, indeed, the most rare between rivals, that of living in union, and rendering to each other the justice which the public voice rendered to both. We regret that this praise cannot be bestowed upon them. But Dufresny, far from acknowledging the talents of his rival, denied him *wit*, at which we may be the less surprized, since he denied the same faculty to Moliere; of this, at least, he was accused by Destouches, who, on his part, as it were to retaliate injustice, denied *good sense* to Dufresny.

The applauses given to the "Glorieux" were the limit of our academician's dramatic triumphs, which were scarcely susceptible of increase, and thenceforth, according to the usual fate of human affairs, must almost necessarily undergo a diminution. He afterwards brought out a

few other pieces, which, without suffering an humiliating failure, were but decently received *. He was too wise to dispute with the public, and, like many unsuccessful authors, to take the fruitless pains of proving, right or wrong, that his judges decided ill. He saw his theatrical glory subside, with the same coolness with which he had seen his expectations of fortune fade away. At length, at the age of sixty, he entirely renounced the theatre, to occupy himself solely with those sentiments of religion which had always maintained a place in his heart. Nor was he contented with paying homage to Christianity by the purity of his faith, he thought himself also obliged to defend it against the attacks of infidels. He filled the French Mercury with long dissertations in which he vigorously repelled these fierce assaults. The public, with equal edification and surprize, saw a writer, who hitherto had

* See NOTE V.

only composed comedies, become in a moment a theologian and controversialist, with all the confidence that the most respectable cause, and the most intrepid conviction, might justly inspire. Some men of worth, indeed, much as they applauded Destouches, and wished him the victory, were surprized that in so important a contest he had chosen for his field of battle a journal principally devoted to extracts from romances and comedies, logogryphes and enigmas. He replied, that he had sent to the "Mercure Galant" (so he named it) writings so little suited to its character, because this journal, from the very frivolity of its plan, was more read than others, and especially by those whom he had resolved to convert, and whom he boasted to confound. He supposed (we wish he did not deceive himself) that heads occupied with comedies, romances and enigmas, would with equal eagerness attend to his grave dissertations, and not find their taste
for

for serious reading impaired by preceding levities.

He did still more. He defended religion not only as a Christian, but also as a poet, in attempting to humble his adversaries by ridicule, the force of which weapon he had learned from his theatrical experience. He wrote against unbelievers a prodigious number of epigrams, among which he particularly valued seven or eight hundred, which he called "Select Epigrams." We may admit that a very severe judgment had not presided at this selection ; but the zeal which made him so copious should excuse the want of nicety in his taste. The same "Mercury" which had been the theatre of his serious battles with the impious, was likewise that of this poetical fencing-play, only meant to brave them. Some of the epigrams which he published in this journal gave some pious readers a strong inclination to become acquainted with the rest, but their wish has hitherto been disappointed. A celebrated philosopher

philosopher of our time, speaking of a work written by a military man against infidelity, says, that " if Religion was not incapable " of glorifying herself on account of what " men do for her, she would perhaps boast " as much of the feeble efforts of a soldier " in her behalf, as in the most learned " productions of a theologian." We will apply this reflection to the performances of Destouches relative to the same subject, substituting only the word *poet* for *soldier*; two kinds of missionaries perhaps not destined to make many proselytes, but perhaps the more laudable in desiring to make them.

In attacking the foes of Christianity, he did not confine himself to exposing their absurdity and impiety; he attempted to wound them more sensibly by denying even to the most celebrated among them, those talents with which, said he, they think themselves so well furnished. He did not spare the merely literary works of several
among

among them, in which, according to him, *wit* waged a perpetual war with *good sense*. It is true, that in the cloud of epigrams by which he displayed his anger against the abuse of wit, he did not enough indulge himself in the use it. But, happily, his earlier productions paid for the later, and proved that if on this occasion he was too sparing of his wealth, it was not through real poverty; — very different from those unfortunate writers, ridiculously vain even in the lap of indigence, who pretend to have shunned wit only because they could not meet with it, and pass off their wretchedness for economy; as if beggars should boast of the modesty of their wardrobe*.

If

* The manifest irony which breaks through the eulogist's account of Desfontaines' efforts in favour of religion, will be pardoned even by those of its serious friends, who are sensible of the injury done to a good cause by injudicious defenders; and who know from numerous examples, that the proficients in poetry and elegant

If the faith of our academician was strict, his devotion was free from austerity; and the muse which dictated his edifying poetry, was able to descend from the celestial regions to indulge in innocent excursions. A poor provincial poet, who wished to acquire those civilities from illustrious names, which he could not hope by publishing his wretched strains under his own name, assumed the character of a young woman, and under that mask ad-

elegant literature are often extremely ill qualified to take a part in theological controversy. The truly pious and learned Dr. Jortin speaks with just contempt of Pope's decisions on topics of divinity, of which, says he, "he was no more a judge than his footman, John Searle." That Destouches made himself really ridiculous by these crusades of his declining years, is pretty evident. He probably regarded them as a salutary penance for having employed all the strength of his powers on a species of composition utterly anathematized by the rigour of the Romish church. TRANSL.

dressed

dressed eulogies in rhyme to the most
 celebrated writers. Destouches was of
 the number. All made due replies to this
 unexpected gallantry. Our pious versifier
 was not more indifferent than the rest,
 and even mingled in his reply some
 touches of that metaphysical and platonic
 love, which so agreeably warms a poet
 who does not allow himself to indulge in
 any other love. The rhymers of both
 sexes soon made himself known, and un-
 derwent from those who had so much
 extolled him, the fate of the poor animal
 who attempts to imitate the little dog
 of the fable. Destouches, a dupe with the
 rest, only laughed at the mistake, and
 substituted silence to their satires.

It was in the midst of this religious war-
 fare, and these poetic relaxations, that our
 academician closed his career, on July 4,
 1754, at the age of seventy-four. Some
 years after his death, the late king
 (Lewis XV.) in order to recompense his
 family

family for his labours and virtues, was pleased to grant his children the favour, then a very distinguished one, but since become too common, of causing their father's works to be printed at the Louvre *. In this edition are several comedies which did not appear during the author's life, and some of which, as the "Fausse Agnès," (Counterfeit Agnes,) and "Tambour Nocturne," (Night-Drum,) have since been acted with success. They are, indeed, little more than farces, but full of action and sprightliness, and at least calculated to please that numerous class of spectators who go to the theatre only in search of amusement, and do not value themselves upon over-refinement in their pleasures †. The merit of this kind

* See NOTE VI.

† The latter of these pieces is a translation of Addison's "Drummer;" which, extolled as it has strangely been by some of our critics, might well appear farcical to one accustomed to the French comic theatre. TRANSL.

of pieces, though greatly inferior to that of dignified and delicate comedy, is not without its value at a time when Thalia has almost forgotten to laugh, and frequently is unable even to weep.

The detail we have entered into respecting the works of Destouches, and which has been dictated to us by the public voice, fixes the judgment which ought to be passed on this estimable writer. If he must rank on the stage below Moliere and Regnard, who surpass him in humour, vivacity, and originality, he is at least entitled to the glory of having after them sustained the honour of the comic theatre, which in our days is sunk almost to nothing. He even deserves a peculiar praise, that of having introduced into his pieces more of the moral, more decorum, more virtuous sentiments, than either of those illustrious painters of our vices and absurdities. In fine, to knowledge of

the stage, skill in contrivance, and foresight of effect, he added a pure and natural style. Hence his productions, first applauded by the pit, and afterwards read with pleasure in the silence of the closet, have found favour before these two tribunals, the first of which is formidable because tumultuous, the second equally so, because tranquil. Such a success is the more flattering to a dramatic writer, as the tranquil tribunal seems to affect more severity, in proportion as the applause of the tumultuous one has been more enthusiastic. The inexorable reader withholds as much as possible those commendations which the spectator wishes to dictate; and is always happily disposed to annul in the final appeal, the favourable decrees too lightly passed in the first instance.

The pieces of Destouches have another title in their favour, the suffrage of many lettered foreigners; a suffrage which

French

French vanity ought not to disdain, if it is flattered, as it should be, by the unsuspected eulogies given by foreigners to our national theatre, and the fortune it has had in all the countries of Europe. In the list of our writers in comedy, they place Destouches immediately after him who, with their consent, as well as ours, occupies singly the first seat—the inimitable Moliere. They prefer the simple truth of representation in Destouches, to the gaiety of Regnard, the striking originality of Dufresny, the epigrammatic salt of le Sage, the lively natural dialogue of Dancourt, and the melting scenes of “Prejugé-a-la-mode,” and “Melanide.” It may be given as a reason for this preference, that Destouches, if not superior to these writers in his details, at least excels them in the character of his works, in a moral portraiture more adapted to be felt and recognized at all times and in all

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places,

places, and thence fitted to produce that moral end which is the genuine object of comedy, though seldom that of comic writers. Generally more attentive to character than to plot, our academician is in this respect inferior to Moliere alone, who has so happily united both these merits. The comedy of all the others, interesting rather from plot than character, is more adapted to merely national relations, to our manner of living, seeing and feeling, to our peculiar extravagancies and absurdities. The "Glorieux," the "Medisant," the "Irresolu," like the "Misanthrope," "Tartuffe," and "Avare," are nearly the same from Lisbon to Paris, and from Paris to Petersburg: every nation discovers in them the originals which nature has placed before their eyes. Whereas the footmen of Regnard, the Gascons and Normans of Dufresny, the financiers of le Sage, the provincial peasants

ants and cits of Dancourt, are more attached to their native soil, and less fitted for transplantation. The more comedy is restricted and concentrated in a certain space, the less sensation it produces out of that space, whatever be its effects within it. A piece in our times shall be constantly applauded on the theatre in the metropolis, shall be written with the choicest elegance, be full of wit, ingenuity, happy points, and verses which are remembered, yet shall be little relished and scarcely understood in the provinces, because the author has painted the manners of Paris rather than those of the nation, of the moment rather than of the year, and has copied the jargon of to-day rather than that of to-morrow. Happy the writer who, like Moliere, knows how to unite truth of character to vivacity of action, the representation of human manners to the draught of

local follies, gay and lively pleasantry to well adapted dialogue ! He may write upon his pictures the Greek artists' inscription, "To Posterity," without fearing, according to the sarcasm of Fontenelle, that they should miscarry by the way.

NOTES
ON THE
EULOGY OF DESTOUCHES.

NOTE I.

AFTER the publication of this eulogy, the son of Destouches wrote a letter to the author, in which he positively contradicts the story of his father's having been on the stage, and gives a totally different account of the manner in which he passed his youth. The letter is not very satisfactory; and seems chiefly designed to save the honour of the family. Yet, on the other hand, it is probable that some, at least, of the anecdotes of his theatrical profession

session above related, have been manufactured by those who love to make out the particulars of a narration, the chief circumstance of which is founded on common report. What appears the most authentic account of his early years is ; that after having passed through the rudiments of a literary education at Tours, he went, with the full concurrence of his father, to Paris, in order to complete his studies ; that being lodged with a bookseller in the capital, he fell in love, at sixteen, with a young person, the relation of his landlord ; the consequences of which amour were such, that young Destouches, afraid to face them, enlisted as a common soldier in a regiment under orders for Spain ; that he was present at the siege of Barcelona, where he narrowly escaped the fate of almost the whole company to which he belonged, who were buried under a mine sprung by the besieged. What became of him afterwards, to the time of his being
 noticed

noticed by the marquis de Puisieux, is the obscure part of his story, which it seems impossible to clear up. It is certain, however, that the common opinion among his literary brethren, and the public in general, and which he never contradicted, though frequently appearing in the satires against him, was, that he had been a player.

NOTE II.

WHILE resident in England, he had a singular negotiation to manage for cardinal Dubois, to whom, indeed, he was indebted for his post. That minister directed him to engage king George I. to ask for him the archbishopric of Cambray, from the regent duke of Orleans. The king, who was treating with the regent on affairs of great consequence, and whom it was the interest of the latter to oblige, could not help viewing this request in a
ridiculous

ridiculous light. "How!" said he to Destouches, "would you have a Protestant prince interfere in making a French archbishop? The regent will only laugh at it, and certainly will pay no regard to such an application."—"Pardon me, Sire," replied Destouches, "he will laugh, indeed, but he will do what you desire." He then presented to the king a very pressing letter, ready for signature. "With all my heart, then," said George, and signed the letter; and Dubois became archbishop of Cambray*.

* Destouches could not act otherwise in his situation; yet religion never suffered a grosser affront than from the consecration of Dubois. It is unfortunate when a man of real piety has such masters as the duke of Orleans and Dubois. But both Addison and Young accepted the patronage of lord Wharton. TRANSL.

NOTE III.

OUR philosopher sometimes observed, that while pruning and lopping his trees in his country retreat, he was struck with a lively image of the nation among whom it was intended to send him :—a nation, docile and submissive, governed by its sovereigns nearly as plants are managed by a severe cultivator, and shewing to Europe all that men can be made by such culture : “ but,” added he, “ trees for trees, “ I like my own best.”

NOTE IV.

It was this Quinault Dufresne who one day said to his servant, speaking of the players, “ Go and tell those people that “ I will not act to-day.” Another time he said, “ I am thought a fortunate “ man ; yet I would exchange my condition for that of a gentleman of twelve “ thousand

“ thousand livres a-year, who lives retired
 “ at his country-seat *.”

NOTE V.

SOME of Destouches's pieces, not noticed in the eulogy, are “ l'Ambitieux,” “ l'Homme Singulier,” “ les Philosophes Amoureux,” “ le Dissipateur,” “ la Force du Naturel.” Most of these met with little success; and those which kept a place on the stage were much inferior to his best works. The “ Dissipateur ” was not acted till after the author's death. It contains some truly humourous scenes, and its conclusion is interesting. From

* The ridiculousness of this speech will, perhaps, want explaining to an English reader. It consists in the player's vanity in supposing that he should descend greatly by submitting to become a little country gentleman. We should be apt to think this really the case, were such a change to happen to one of our capital actors. TRANSL.

“ l'Am-

" l'Ambitieux " much was expected ; whence the players were impatient to bring it out ; though it underwent some delay, because the censor discerned, in the part of the *ambitious man*, allusions too plain to M. Chauvelin, then keeper of the seals, and minister for foreign affairs. He was disgraced shortly after, and the piece was then permitted to appear with some slight alterations. The players had given out that they would bring on this comedy without first putting it in the bills, which for some time drew a crowd of spectators. When it at length appeared, the crowd soon diminished.

Besides his dramatic works of five acts, Destouches wrote some small pieces, which were applauded, and of which some are still occasionally represented. We shall only mention " le Triple Marriage," a lively and pleasant comedy, founded upon a real circumstance which had recently happened. A widower in the decline

cline of life, having fallen in love with a young person of much inferior condition, married her secretly, but at length thought proper to acknowledge the fact to his son and daughter. They took this opportunity of disclosing to him, that both of them also had made free to follow their inclinations by contracting a similar engagement. This adventure appeared to Destouches to afford a happy subject for a comedy, and its success justified his opinion.

NOTE VI.

THE Louvre edition of Destouches's works, published with much care, and magnificently printed, deserves the notice of the curious. Besides the pieces composed for the French theatre, there are inserted some entertainments meant to be set to music, which the author had written for the duchess of Maine. Among these is the ballet of the "Amours of Ra-

“ gonde,” which was represented some years ago on the Lyric stage, in those days destined to mirth, when the spectators are permitted for a time to forget the stately gravity of that theatre.

1000

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EULOGY

OF

CREBILLON.*

PROSPER JOLYOT DE CREBILLON was born at Dijon, on February 13, 1674. The capital of Burgundy boasts of being the native place of a great number of celebrated men in literature, among whom we shall only mention Bossuet, a name which renders the enumeration of the rest superfluous.

The young Crebillon entered upon his studies among the Jesuits, who, in like manner, were the first instructors of several distinguished writers. Of these we shall here advert only to the three most

* Read August 25th, 1778.

illustrious; Bossuet, whom they wished to make their own, and who escaped them; the great Corneille, who *always* loved them; and Voltaire, who loved them *a long while*. It is too well known how little education, as unfortunately practised among us, is adapted for forming great men. It would seem much fitter to stifle genius in its cradle, if Nature, which in savage countries sometimes bestows fecundity on the earth in spite of the barbarism of the inhabitants, had not also given to minds of the first class an energy not to be subdued by the worst tuition. It is however the custom, through motives either of respect, or of indulgence to the self-love of masters, to grant them some share in the glory their disciples may have acquired by their own efforts, and in defiance of their education. In this case, the society of Jesuits, illustrious as it has become by means of the celebrated men who have belonged to it, might have still more
reason

reason to boast of its pupils than its members *.

An anecdote which the abbé d'Olivet often related, and with which he was acquainted at the source, apprizes us that Crebillon, while yet at college, announced those talents which were afterwards to acquire him fame, and at the same time that love for an independent and unshackled life which he displayed to the end of his days. The Jesuits, who, to render them justice, zealously occupied themselves in the education of the children so long entrusted to their care, did not, meanwhile, forget the advantage of their society, which was ever before their eyes; nor shall we reproach them with this patriotic sentiment. With this view they studied to gain a perfect knowledge of their disciples, in order to derive from it all possible assistance in the projects they might form with relation to them. To this purpose they

* See NOTE I.

kept in every college a secret register, in which they wrote the name of each scholar, with a note in Latin descriptive of his abilities, disposition, and character: Fontenelle, for example, who had studied in their seminary at Rouen, his native city, was entered as "*Adolescens omnibus numeris absolutus, & inter discipulos princeps* :—A youth accomplished in all points, and the first among the scholars." The note annexed to Crebillon was less to his honour: "*Puer ingeniosus, sed insignis nebulo* :—A boy of parts, but remarkably graceless." We should not have ventured to mention so trifling a circumstance of Crebillon's puerile years, had his after-conduct justified the vituperative epithet so early bestowed upon him. But such an epithet, applied by the regent of a college to a scholar full of vivacity, implied no more than the impetuosity natural to a child, who gave himself up with ardour to the innocent pleasures

of his age, and felt a very excusable disgust for studies forbidding both in matter and form ; who began to exhibit a firm and decided character, incapable of submitting to petty regulations ; and who perhaps already was able to detect in his tutors those too frequent errors and inconsistencies, which masters are not skillful enough to conceal from the notice of their scholars. In reality, they who have the care of educating youth do not enough reflect, that children pass immediately into their hands from those of nature ; and not yet having their reason spoilt (as la Fontaine says) by the prejudices of education or society, they are much more sagacious than is generally imagined, in discerning what is unjust and ridiculous. Both these they seize upon and appreciate with an accuracy of feeling which often excites despair in their teachers, and leads them to pronounce judgments of character, which are too interested to be equitable. Such,

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doubt-

doubtless, was the young Crebillon, whom the Jesuits regarded as one of the pests of their college*.

His family, long distinguished in the magistracy, both on the father's and mother's side, wished to preserve its acquired lustre, as a precious and respectable inheritance. In consequence of these intentions, his father, chief register in the chamber of accounts at Dijon, destined him to the gown, without consulting either his son's inclination, or the decrees of Nature, who so often delights in thwarting

* This appears to be a merely gratuitous assumption in favour of Crebillon; and the apology for irregularities among schoolboys is much too general to be just or philosophical. It may happen that conscious superiority of spirit and genius may occasionally lead a youth of hopes into contempt of his studies and tutors; but defiance of order, and indisposition to application, much more frequently proceed from qualities of baser alloy, and such as exert a very unfavourable influence through after-life.

TRANSL.

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the projects of fathers, and who, in spite of them, has formed Despréauxs, Molières, and so many other men of the same stamp. The young man wished to devote himself to literature, his true and sole vocation; but his parents had too deeply imbibed the old maxim which had in so many families proscribed without mercy the profession of a man of letters; a maxim which may be called the perpetual apophthegm of almost all parents. According to them, it is having no place in society, or, as they express it, not *being any thing*, to aim at acquitting the debt of patriotism, by enlightening or honouring one's country as an author *. Sacrificed to this grand principle,

* The eulogist here seems to shew himself as unjust to parents, as he was in the former paragraph to preceptors. He must surely have known that a vast majority of supposed literary vocations are no more than the spurious offspring of vanity and idleness; and that very few even of those which have originated from real genius, have early declared themselves
by

principle, Crebillon studied law at Paris, was admitted advocate, quietly took his dose of legal trash, and afterwards went to a solicitor's office, in order to learn the elements of chicane, which may be presumed to have been still less to his taste. He submitted to the task, however, with all the docility which is compatible with excessive repugnance. His compensation for this irksome employment was a frequent attendance on public spectacles. The strong relish he acquired for this amusement, soon was converted into a violent passion, which took such an ascendancy over his mind, that he was one day unable to contain himself in presence of his preceptor the solicitor, from whom he

by tokens which could justify a parent in sacrificing to a son's capricious disgusts, the solid prospects afforded by a respectable profession. By what follows, it would appear that Crebillon long distinguished himself only as a youth who loved plays better than business. TRANSL.

had

had hitherto carefully concealed the forbidden pleasure in which he indulged. The solicitor, a man of penetration, regarded the eloquence with which Crebillon spoke of the master-pieces of the drama, as an indication of talents formed hereafter to shine on the theatre. He ventured to advise his pupil to renounce the bar, and even the magistracy, to follow the impulse of his genius, and to disobey his parents for the sake of illustrating the name they bore.

To judge of the temper of Crebillon by the cast of his imagination, vigorous and inclined to daring, it might be supposed that it would not be necessary to apprise him whither his genius led, or at least that nothing more would have been necessary ; as placing arms before Achilles was enough to convince him of his destination. But the exhortations of his friend at first disheartened rather than encouraged him. Filled with respect and admiration
for

for those immortal writers who have conferred so much splendour on the French theatre, and not believing himself destined to follow them even at a distance, he regarded his ambition as a species of sacrilege. Thus the man who was to become one of our principal tragic authors, inspired by the modesty and timidity which always accompany genius awed by great models, was afraid to enter that path of glory in which they invited him to follow them; whilst a crowd of presumptuous adventurers, whom nothing in this formidable path appals, because they wait for no invitation, throw themselves into it with a blind confidence, and soon disappear for ever. At length, however, young Crebillon, daily urged by counsels the sincerity of which he could not suspect, and still more excited by an internal and commanding voice which it was vain to resist, hazarded a piece which he read to the players. Its fate led him at first to believe

believe that this importunate voice had deceived him: the piece was rejected by that Areopagus which he had taken for its judge. The chagrin he received from this circumstance overflowed on his friend the solicitor, whom he now considered almost as an enemy who had plotted his dishonour: he swore he would never again credit him, and would not write another verse in his life.

Lovers and poets soon forget their oaths. Crebillon gradually became calm, returned to the dictate of nature, and wrote his tragedy of "Idomeneus," the success of which was sufficient to console him for his former misfortune. Its action, however, was feeble, and its style negligent; and a rivalry in love between a father and son, unhappily conceived in such a subject, gave much scope to censure*: yet some particular beauties caused the faults both of the plan and of the execution to be par-

* See NOTE II.

doned.

doned. The fifth act, however, was ill received at the first representation. With equal quickness and docility the poet wrote a better, which was composed, learned, and acted within five days. So remarkable a facility was the signal for happier efforts; and Crebillon, from this first step darting forward in the tragic course, soon convinced the astonished public of his rapid progress. He made a single bound from "Idomeneus" to "Atreus and Thyestes," a tragedy which left the former far behind it. The ground-work of the interest in the latter piece is not, indeed, much more considerable than in "Idomeneus;" but the action is more lively and attractive; the style, without being much more correct, has more colour and strength; and the beauties are more frequent and striking. This tragedy long kept its place on the stage, but the horrid catastrophe by which it is terminated, the blood presented by Atreus to Thyestes to drink,

has

has always injured the complete success of the piece at its revivals, as it did during its novelty*. It may perhaps be supposed that it would now succeed better, since a situation still more shocking in "Gabrielle de Vergy" has long been seen to attract spectators. But without undertaking either to justify or censure the success of the latter, we are of opinion that "Atreus" can never expect the same. In Crebillon's piece the horror of the fifth act is absolutely disgusting and without interest. It breaks out almost without warning at the instant when Atreus presents to Thyestes the blood of his son; and this shocking moment, which nothing prepares or softens, excites just aversion in the spectator. In "Gabrielle," the horror is alleviated by the interest taken in the two lovers, by the touching though terrible spectacle of Gabrielle's agonising grief, and even by the prolongation of the scene, which

* See NOTE III.

lessens

lessens the violence of its effect, by giving the spectator time to discover that he is present only at a representation. These, if we may hazard our opinion, are the reasons why the women, who throw themselves back in their boxes when they see the bloody cup of Atreus fall and shed its contents on the stage, behold with unaverted eyes, though shuddering, the urn and anguish of Gabrielle; like those children who love to hear frightful stories, and in the midst of their fright return to hear them again. On the stage, a sudden and instantaneous shudder is painful only when its cause is repulsive; but in a situation in other respects terrible, a lasting and protracted shudder may occasion a kind of pleasure, and thus render the situation less distressing. Be this as it may, the tragedy of Atreus obtained the highest encomiums; and the general esteem it acquired raised to the summit of felicity not only the poet, but the solicitor who had given

given him to the theatre. Though attacked with a mortal disease, he caused himself to be carried to the first representation of "Atreus." He would have quitted it with unpleasant feelings had he waited the judgment of the spectators to decide his own; for it was coldly enough received; the pit appeared rather struck with consternation than interested; the curtain fell without either hisses or plaudits; and the audience slunk away in that inauspicious silence which announces no wish for a second hearing. But the man of the law judged better than the public, or, rather, he judged from the first impression as the public were soon after to judge. When the piece was ended, he went behind the scenes in search of his friend, whom he found quite uncertain of his fate, and almost resigned to his fall. He embraced Crebillon with transport, exclaiming, "I die content—I have made

“ you a poet, and I leave a man to the
“ nation.”

The character of horror for which “Atreus” was reproached was softened by the author, not without some regret, in his tragedy of “Electra” which soon followed, and which obtained great and deserved success. This piece was, however, criticised for some embarrassment in the developement, and a double love which throws languor especially over the first act. But the interesting nature of the subject, the warmth of the action, happy and impressive lines, the character of Electra drawn with a firm and noble pencil, and the superior beauty of the part of Palamedes, united all suffrages, and silenced the critics.

After the success of Electra, it might have been supposed that Crebillon’s dramatic glory had been at its height. It was already a rare thing to see at the theatre triumphs

triumphs so rapid, and uninterrupted by failures. It was still more rare to see a progressive augmentation of success, and a poet, like Homer's Neptune, with three strides arriving at his journey's end. Crebillon had already left far behind him the whole swarm of tragic poets who lingered on the scene after Corneille and Racine. He surpassed himself in "Rhadamistus," his master-piece, and, we may add, one of those of the French theatre. This piece is bold and lofty in its design, original and vigorous in its execution. The characters of Rhadamistus, Zenobia, and Pharasmanes are drawn with equal energy and warmth; the action is interesting and animated; the situations striking and theatrical; the style is marked with a kind of savage dignity, which seems to be the characteristic quality of this tragedy, and to distinguish it from all others. Among many scenes of great effect, that in which Zenobia declares her love for Arsames in presence of

her husband, is one of the finest on the theatre. The superiority of the three last acts, and even of part of the second, excused the languor of the first, and especially the obscurity of a developement as cold, more complicated, and less probable than that of "Rodogune," but which, as well as Rodogune, produces theatrical beauties of the first order: so true it is, that the success of a tragedy depends much more on the sudden and instantaneous effect of situations, than on the preparation, or even the probability, of incidents; and that, on the stage, as Voltaire has well remarked, "it is better to strike hard than to strike true." The subject of "Rhadamistus" had wonderfully delighted Crebillon. The part of Pharasmanes, the implacable enemy of Roman ambition and arrogance, gave scope to the author to display in all its force the deep and lively hatred with which he was himself penetrated for these tyrants of the universe;

universe; for this was the title he always gave to the Romans, whose annals awaken so many ideas of glory, and whose glory made so many wretched. He considered the conquests of this insolent and cruel nation, and the chains which it imposed upon so many nations, as one of the greatest calamities which had ever befallen the human race. Reserved in speaking on other topics, he was always eloquent upon this. He could not pardon the author of "Mithridates" for having, in his opinion, too feebly expressed the violent hatred this prince bore the Romans. This want of force for which he reproached Racine, rendered him unjust with regard to this great poet, whom he was contented with characterising as "the most elegant of our writers." In the part of Pharasmanes he expressed the prince's aversion, and his own, for the Roman nation, with all the vigour of a lofty and independent mind, which burned against oppression and des-

potism; and good judges determined, that if Racine knew how to paint love, Crebillon was not less skilled in painting hatred*.

Nevertheless, "Rhadamistus" which had obtained such distinguished favour from the public, could not even obtain mercy from the severe Despréaux, who was still living. He expressed himself with more harshness with respect to this piece, than he had done in his satires with respect to the productions which he regarded as the most contemptible. "I have lived too long," he cried in a rage: "to what Visigoths do I leave the French theatre a prey! The Boyers and Pradons whom we treated with so much ridicule were eagles compared to this man." This comparison was equally injurious and unjust. But the merit of versification, that first of merits in Despréaux's eyes, was, it must be confessed, the weak part of the new

* See NOTE IV.

tragedy.

tragedy. Further, this inexorable judge, still filled with the remembrance of the men of genius with whom he had lived, Moliere, Racine, and Corneille, looked only with disdain on their successors. La Motte, in his eyes, was only a man of wit without talents; Rousseau, a versifier without ideas; and Crebillon, a poet of barbarism. The merit of Fontenelle was lost upon him, and the author of the "Henriade" had not yet written. Despréaux would gladly have paid the rising literary generation the same compliment that the aged and blunt Nestor pays the Grecian princes in the Iliad: "I advise you to listen to me, for I have formerly lived with men much your betters." In fine, what augmented the inflexible rigour of his decrees was, that he then laboured under numerous infirmities, and had been attacked with the disease of which he soon after died. From Despréaux sick and old, could not be expected that equity which

Despréaux young and in health had not always shewn towards his contemporary poets; and the author of "Electra" was not likely to be better treated than that of "Armida." Crebillon consoled himself by the public enthusiasm for "Rhadamistus," which was so steadfast as not to be weakened even by a closet-perusal, so fatal to ephemeral success. Two editions of his piece were printed in a week. It received the highest applause at Versailles, which in this instance agreed with Paris; and the author's friends pressed him to shew himself at court to enjoy his triumph, and to receive thence those favours which his narrow fortune rendered necessary. Full of these fallacious hopes, he repaired to Versailles, and was totally disregarded. So much coldness astonished, though without afflicting him; and what best proves his ignorance of the country he was got into, is his simplicity in residing there with patience two or three years, always expecting

expecting the favourable notice he was promised, but, indeed, neither seeking it, nor doing any thing to accelerate the period. Wearied, at length, with being forgotten, and too well convinced of the truth of that line, the product of so much experience,

Q'un poete à la cour est de bien mince alloi,
That a poet at court is a beggarly thing,

he quitted, without return, and without regret, an abode so little fitted for him, and thenceforth took for his motto, "Expect nothing but from thyself."

Reduced to the sole resource of his talents, he flattered himself with obtaining fresh laurels, and with giving worthy successors to Rhadamistus. But to all writers, and especially to dramatic authors, there is an æra at which their success reaches the highest point which their measure of genius permits them to attain; a kind of meridian of their glory, whence it must necessarily decline.

decline. This happened to Crebillon, in common with all other tragedians, if the author of "Phædra" and "Athaliah" be excepted, who finished with his two master-pieces. Rhadamistus was followed by "Xerxes" and "Semiramis," both of which had very small success. Besides the particular faults of these tragedies, the author was reproached with monotony in his subjects and manner, and with being unable to quit that tragic horror which had been tolerated, or even applauded, in his early pieces, but which proved tiresome and disgusting in the later. He hoped to refute these censures by writing "Pyrrhus," the subject, incidents, and style of which were more suited to the delicacy, or, as he termed it, the effeminacy of the spectators. In this piece there was no death; the author had so far done violence to himself: but as he was in full force, and at home, only in a blood-stained theatre, he had, by his own account, laboured

laboured with a kind of disrelish in the composition of this *shade* of a tragedy, which cost him five years to finish. The piece, nevertheless, met with a better reception than such a forced and protracted birth seemed to promise. But its success was temporary, and the work has disappeared from the stage; like a distant collateral relation, who having intruded into a succession which does not belong to him, is obliged to give way to the lawful heirs *.

We should not omit to mention, that in the interval between "Xerxes" and "Semiramis" Crebillon had commenced a tragedy of "Cromwell," in which he gave the freest range to those sentiments of liberty which were so profoundly engraven in his heart. He read to his friends some scenes of this play, which painted the English antipathy to absolute power with so much energy, that he received a prohibition from continuing the piece. He

* See NOTE V.

was very far from meaning to justify the criminal act of a subject, whose odious fanaticism, covering itself with the shield of the law, dared to deprive a virtuous monarch of his crown and life; but he had represented Cromwell as a villain with a great soul; and that attentive administration which among us watches over the national spirit, feared lest admiration for the criminal should diminish horror for the crime, lest the picture of a free people should make too lively an impression on a nation governed by other laws, and lest hatred for despotism should enfeeble respect for authority. Some verses of this tragedy have remained, which the author's friends often heard him recite, and in which the usurper displays his antimonarchical maxims with the most insolent audacity. These lines, though uttered from the mouth of a rebel, and consequently little adapted to shake the fidelity of subjects penetrated with the duty owing to lawful power,

appeared,

appeared, however, too offensive to be heard on the theatre of a nation which places so much of its honour in loving its sovereigns; and Crebillon submitted to the decree with the greater docility, as, while he detested arbitrary authority, he respected and cherished that of his king. He has himself marked this double principle in his copy of the famous book entitled "*Vindiciæ contra Tyrannos*," (by Hubert Languet,) a work, the object of which is to fix the reciprocal rights of kings and people. In this copy, which we have inspected, Crebillon has carefully under-lined the passages relative to hatred of despotism, and the right which tyranny gives to the oppressed of opposing and annihilating it; and likewise those relative to the love and obedience due from a people to a wise and moderate rule, founded on justice and the laws. Thus, always bold and free, and yet loyal and a Frenchman, Crebillon equally avoided the mad-

ness

ness of revolt, and the baseness of slavery*.

To return to his dramatic labours—The tragedy of “Pyrrhus” was almost their limit; either because its composition, so adverse to his taste, had exhausted his genius by fatiguing it, like foreign plants which dry up the soil that is forced to

* Notwithstanding all that d’Alembert has thought necessary to say on the subject, it was impossible he could be ignorant of what subsequent events have too fatally proved,—that there existed in France no code of reciprocal right between the monarch and the subject, and consequently no proper basis of an alliance between love for liberty and attachment to authority. It is probable that he himself, with the best of the *philosophical party*, wished gradually and without commotion to introduce such a kind of bill of rights, which the progress of the public in just notions of the origin and ends of government seemed to render more and more expedient and practicable. Whether by any management this could have been quietly effected, must ever now remain problematical. We only know, that the contest of opposite principles has in fact produced a crisis more terrible than Europe perhaps ever before witnessed. TRANSL.

rear

rear them, or because the author, finding himself, after all his success, more furnished with laurels than with fortune, became at length disgusted with that theatre on which he had shone so long. He at the same time almost entirely renounced the commerce of mankind, not through ill-humour or misanthropy, but through love for that liberty which he regarded as his sole remaining possession. This independent character rendered him incapable of bearing a part in those frivolities of society which are decorated with the title of attentions and devoirs. Still less possible was it for him to bend to those assiduities so necessary to be practised towards men in power, in order to acquire what are termed *protectors*, the haughty patrons of those moderate talents which court them, and the secret enemies of those distinguished abilities which neglect them. Crebillon plunged himself into an unknown retreat, where he adopted a simple, frugal, and

almost rigid mode of living, surrounded by animals whose attachment consoled him for the injustice of men; or rather compensated him; for he seemed scarcely to feel this injustice so far was he from complaining of it. Whether through apathy or equity, he had never imputed his theatrical disgraces but to himself alone. After the first representation of "Xerxes," which, as we have observed, was not a favourable one, he asked the players for their parts, and having thrown them into the fire in their presence, he said, "I was mistaken, but the public has undeceived me."

Notwithstanding his repeated successes, he was unable, in the most brilliant season of his reputation, to obtain a seat in the French academy. The most hostile literary cabals united against him; because the chiefs and managers of these cabals considered Crebillon as a man likely to consign them all to speedy obscurity by the lustre

lustre of his fame. It must also be confessed, that he had by his own fault somewhat irritated the self-love of those who at that time enjoyed a degree of literary reputation. He had written against them an ingenious and poignant satire, which, however, he had the moderation or prudence never to print. His detractors were pleasantly designated in it by the names of animals, which characterised them with a justness striking enough to offend: one was the mole, another the ape, one the camel, another the fox. This was the only satire in which Crebillon indulged himself during his life; and he may be pardoned the first impulse of oppressed genius, which, at the moment of irritation from an injury received, revenges itself, then repents of its weakness, and thenceforth employs against its enemies only the arms of patience, success, and silence. Crebillon was far from giving in this point his brother-poets a bad example, which

unfortunately they so little want. He never expressed himself but with the profoundest disdain concerning those more troublesome than hurtful insects by which literature is infested. A young poet one day read him a satire of his own composition; he heard it calmly, and when it was finished, "Judge" said he "how easy" and worthless is this wretched species of "writing, since at your age you succeed" in it."

It may not be useless to remark, as a fact worthy of preservation in the history of human folly, that the enemies of Crebillon, unable to state any fault in his personal conduct, sought in his works for proofs of the perversity of his character. According to them, he must have had a dark soul, to give the preference to the subjects he had chosen. "I have been" loaded," says he, in the preface to " 'Atreus' with all the wickedness of" this personage, and in some places I
 " am

“ am still looked upon as one with whom
 “ it is not safe to live.” These few words
 were sufficient to render his enemies ridiculous, and might have dispensed him from honouring their absurd imputation with the serious reply he thought proper to make. They had carried their folly so far as to reproach him with the atrocious maxims he had put into the mouth of some villains, as if they had been the real sentiments of his heart. The censor of “ Semiramis,” after having long suspended his approbation, thought himself very indulgent in granting it according to the following form : “ I have read Semiramis,
 “ and it has appeared to me that its impression may be *tolerated*, in consequence of
 “ the death of the princess, though unaccompanied by remorse.” It is true that this licenser was one of the heroes of the satire abovementioned ; and scruple lent on this occasion its petty aid to the vengeance of offended self-love. Such were

the means employed by hatred and envy to banish Crebillon from the scene ; and unfortunately they succeeded too well in reducing him to that silence which set them so much at their ease.

It will not be readily guessed what was his principal occupation in his solitude. He imagined subjects for romances, which he afterwards composed in his head without writing ; for his memory was as prodigious as his indolence was unsurmountable. He had a great passion for this species of composition ; and as he was almost indifferent to all other kinds of reading, he had read little but our ancient romances ; especially those of Calprenede, of whom he never spoke without admiration, and from whose works he acknowledged he had derived much assistance in his tragedies *.—One day when he was closely occupied with the invention of one of his romances, a person hastily

* See NOTE VI.

entered his room. "Do not disturb me" he cried; "I am in an interesting crisis; I am going to hang a knavish minister, and turn out an incapable one."

He had been long forgotten, and as it were dead to the nation, when it was thought proper to recollect that he existed, and to render him justice. He entered into the French academy (Sep. 27, 1731,) and obtained favours from the court. But how well soever bestowed were these recompences, the honour of them must not hastily be given to the equity of his contemporaries. The same hatred which had robbed him of literary distinctions at a time when he was most worthy of them, would now gladly have overwhelmed him with them, in order to humiliate another writer, whose glory had long merited all the vigilance of envy. The author of "Œdipus," "Brutus," and "Zaire," (Voltaire,) had taken a flight which alarmed those, who believing themselves in

possession of the sceptre of literature, were not disposed to resign it into other hands. They sought out, in the depth of his retreat, the aged and forsaken Crebillon, who, having been dumb and solitary for 30 years, could no longer be formidable to them, but whom they hoped successfully to oppose, like a phantom, to the illustrious writer by whom they saw themselves eclipsed: nearly in the same manner, to compare small things with great, as the Leaguers formerly drew from his obscurity an old cardinal, in order to give him the vain title of king while they reigned in his name, and to deprive of his crown the worthy sovereign whom they forced to obtain it by conquest. Thus the partisans of Crebillon proclaimed him the true and sole inheritor of the sceptre of Corneille and Racine, and by their own authority placed him on the throne of these two great men. They even ventured to make a partition of the dramatic domain, and
 assigned

assigned to each of these authors his respective share; and as the surest method to give an opinion credit with French frivolity, is to invent some phrase which may make silly people believe they utter something of importance while they repeat it, the cabal introduced this sentence, " Corneille grand, Racine tender, Crebillon tragic," as if neither Corneille nor Racine had written tragedy. No place was left for a fourth, had he been grand, tender and tragic together. The just admirers of Voltaire ascribed to him all these qualities, but it was privately and in an under-voice. The adverse faction imposed silence on them, by the tone they then gave to all societies. These supreme and enlightened judges, as full of confidence as if they had been just, were not contented with reviving the glory of Crebillon, and refreshing his former laurels; they would oblige him to gain new garlands with the hope of withering those

of his competitor. They urged the poet to finish his tragedy of "Catiline," which he had begun thirty years before, and which, from some passages he had read to his friends, was spoken of as a dramatic wonder. The public, who had so long heard this work praised, and had been continually disappointed in the promise of its appearance, sometimes exclaimed, with Cicero, "How long, O Catiline! will you abuse our patience?" At length, the encouragement given to Crebillon from all quarters, the solicitations of Paris and Versailles, the prayers of the academy, even the commands of the king, all determined him to finish and produce his tragedy. But the event proved that he would have done better in continuing to obey his indolence, than in listening to his friends and partisans.

This piece, little worthy the author of "Rhadamistus," and which was never revived after it ceased to be new, had, however,

however, a momentary success, or rather attained a considerable number of representations without any real esteem. For this indulgence it was indebted to the interest inspired in the public by the advanced age of the author, and especially to the numerous and potent cabal whose object was to sacrifice his rival *. Crebillon himself was so little flattered by the indiscreet ardour of his friends, that he opposed, as much as he was able, all the means they wished to employ for his success. One of them having asked him for tickets for the first representation of "Cataline," "You well know" he replied "that I would not have a single person in the pit who should think himself obliged to applaud me."—"Such ap-

* It has been thought proper here to omit three or four pages of the original, which are solely devoted to the purpose of extolling the superior merit of Voltaire, and vilifying his enemies and detractors.

TRANSL.

"plause

“plause” returned his friend “it is so far from my intention to procure, that, you may be assured, the persons to whom I shall give your tickets will be the first to hiss the piece, if it deserves to be hissed.”—“In that case” said Crebillon “you shall have them.”

We have hitherto but just mentioned his entrance into the academy. His name is too distinguished in our list to permit us to pass over this reception so lightly. It was, moreover, remarkable by a singularity till then unexampled. He returned his thanks in verse; and this novelty was the more relished as the public had long been satiated with the uniformity of these harangues. Yet, whether through timidity or indolence, the new academicien did not carry his innovation so far as his reputation, his age, and the unanimous wish of his auditors would have authorised him to do. He preserved in his discourse the ground-work of all those with which our assemblies

assemblies had so often resounded ; and only repeated, in verses more vigorous than elegant, the customary compliments so long heard in prose.

Another memorable circumstance was, that at the moment of his reciting this verse,

Aucun fiel n'a jamais empoisonné ma plume ;
No gall has e'er shed venom on my quill ;

the auditors, by reiterated applauses, confirmed the testimony he rendered himself *. For the public, which takes some satisfaction in seeing men of eminence vilified, gives them credit for abstaining from a reply ; because, to the secret pleasure of beholding them insulted without retaliation, is united the equally secret justice it renders them for being superior to satire. Hence, when the satire is forgotten, which never fails soon to happen, all concur in praising their moderation and silence.

* See NOTE VII.

They

They are applauded at the same time for having known their strength in shewing themselves insensible to insults, and for having forborne to disturb the pleasure, as well of the authors of these insults, as of their readers *.

The favours of the court, even when Crebillon was loaded with them, did not enervate his soul. Anxious to justify them

* Here is a very fine drawn tissue of remark and hypothesis, deduced from a very simple and natural circumstance. If Crebillon's auditors were sensible that he spoke truth in denying that his pen had ever been prostituted to private malice, the spontaneous emotions of virtue in every breast were sufficient to ensure him general approbation. But d'Alembert, when he gets upon his favourite topic of literary malignity, never knows where to end his caustic refinements, evidently betraying how sensibly, in his own person, or those of his friends and party, he had felt the shafts of satire. From the complaints of French writers, it may without breach of candour be inferred, that in no country has literature been infested by paltry intrigues, mean cabals, and ill-natured machinations, so much as in France. TRANSL.

by

by new success, he undertook a tragedy on "The Triumvirate," in which he thought he might introduce, with some slight alterations, several passages of that tragedy of "Cromwell," formerly so dear to him, and which he had suppressed against his will. He ventured in a public meeting of the academy to read some of these passages, the force, and especially the boldness of which made a strong impression on all the audience. The effect was so general and violent, that the author received an order, not to suppress the piece, but to soften those strokes which might alarm the circumspect prudence of government.

Thwarted in his labours, but not dispirited, Crebillon weakened and spoiled his work through obedience: he had, however, the resolution to finish it, though his age of above fourscore allowed and perhaps prescribed to him repose. He was peculiarly interested to complete the piece,
from

from a strong desire he felt of repairing the honour of Cicero, whom he reproached himself with representing as too weak and little a character in his "Catiline." The piece was brought on the theatre, but not with the success of the "Œdipus at Colone" which Sophocles had composed at nearly the same age. The season of favour or indulgence was passed: the old age alone of the author was seen in "The Triumvirate," and though it escaped being hissed, the crowd staid away. After a few representations, the tragedy disappeared, and the author thought only of finishing the remainder of his days in peace.

We have already observed that the memory of Crebillon was astonishing: it continued so to the end of his life. He never wrote down his pieces till the moment of representation; and when more than seventy, he repeated by heart his tragedy of "Catiline" to the actors. When he
recited

recited a scene to his friends, and they made a criticism which appeared to him just, he recomposed the passage, and totally forgot the first manner, remembering only the last. Thus his memory, under the command of his taste, preserved only what he wished to retain. In general, he was much more docile to criticism, than so many authors to whom this docility would have been so useful. He once recited to a company of men of letters a tragedy he had just composed, and finding that they did not admire it, "There is no more to be said about it," he cried, "you have pronounced its sentence;" and thenceforth he entirely forgot it.

Though the turn of his mind was rather to force than gaiety, yet he could jest occasionally. At the time when he had suspended the progress of his "Catiline," of which he had composed only the two first acts, he fell dangerously ill. His physician, who despaired of his recovery,

and probably feared for his fees, asked him for these acts. The sick man replied to him by this line of "Rhadarnistus ;"

Ah ! doit on hériter de ceux qu'on assassine ?

What ! shall a man's assassin be his heir ?

While he was finishing this long-expected "Catiline," he one day recited a whole scene before a young man, who immediately repeated to him several passages of it. "Are not you, Sir," said Crebillon, "the Chartreux who writes my pieces ?" This was a good-humoured allusion to a story raised by some facetious persons, and credited by some dupes, that the real author of Crebillon's tragedies was a Chartreux, for that productions of so dismal a kind could only take birth from the cell of a gloomy solitary : they added, that the monk died while he was at work upon "Catiline," and that the unfortunate piece was buried in the same tomb.

From

From the time when Crebillon first devoted himself to the theatre, he fell in love, and married without the consent of his parents. His father, like the country mayor in the "Metromanie," was already greatly irritated against him for having preferred the glory of a celebrated writer to the consequence of a subaltern magistrate. But he thought his son entirely dishonoured by alliance with a family neither opulent nor noble, though decent and virtuous; and he disinherited him for his ingratitude and rebellion. Some years afterwards, however, when the brilliant reputation Crebillon began to enjoy came to the ears of his hitherto inexorable father, the old-man's vanity was flattered, and he began to think that his son had acted his part in life very prudently. In consequence, he restored him to his rights, and vanity repaired the wrongs of nature. Crebillon, after his father's death, went to receive the very moderate inheritance he

had left him ; but, thanks to his carelessness with regard to his interest, the fees of justice devoured a part, and the *system** finished the rest. He found a resource in the bounty of some opulent persons, whose vanity aspired to enrich him ; but they were soon wearied with heaping favours upon one who would neither be their humble servant nor their dependant. Crebillon again became free and poor ; and though, during the season of his transitory opulence, he had carried the love of expence to a taste for fancies and superfluities, he had no difficulty in accommodating himself to the kind of life his new situation required. He passed without effort, as Alcibiades had formerly done, from the luxury of Persia to the austerity of Sparta ; and found himself (which Alcibiades certainly did not) still happier in the second state than in the first.

* Law's Mississippi bubble.

He had a son, of whom death has lately deprived the literary world, and who likewise became celebrated by his writings, but of a kind very different from those of his father. The elder Crebillon painted in the darkest colours the crimes and villainies of men: the younger, in romances full of ingenuity, and dictated by a profound knowledge of all the secret folds of the human heart, has represented, with the most delicate and accurate pencil, the refinements, the shades, and even the graces of our vices; that seductive sprightliness which renders the French what is termed *amiable*, a word which does not signify *worthy of being loved*; that restless activity which makes them feel listlessness even on the bosom of pleasure; that perversion of principle, disguised, and in some measure softened, by the mask of decencies; in fine, that united corruption and frivolity of our manners, in which the excess of depravity is allied with the excess of absurdity*.

* See NOTE VIII.

Crebillon died on June 17, 1762, aged eighty-eight, of a disease which the robustness of his constitution long resisted; for he preserved all his strength to the concluding years of his life, notwithstanding the little care he took to husband it, or perhaps in consequence of the rude trials he made it undergo. Government, which had granted him so distinguished a protection, had a momentary intention of raising a mausoleum to his memory; a homage which had been paid neither to Corneille nor to Racine, still less to Moliere, whose remains scarcely could obtain the usual funeral honours, and even for those had been indebted to the great king who had been his protector while living. The mausoleum of Crebillon, however, never went further than the design, the poet's death having presently cooled that artificial and fugitive warmth in his favour, which originated in his old age*.

* See NOTE IX.

May we venture to close this eulogy by some reflections on the character of Crebillon's pieces, and on the parallel which may be drawn between this writer and our principal tragic poets? One of our most celebrated associates, the author of the fine poem of "the Seasons," has remarked with great justice, notwithstanding all that has been said by the herd of critics, that the two illustrious founders of tragedy amongst us seem rather to have aimed at painting men than nations; that Racine has characterised only one nation, that of the Jews; and Corneille only two, the Romans and Spaniards; that Voltaire alone has painted all the people who came before him, Greeks, Romans, French, Spaniards, Americans, Chinese, and Arabians. Crebillon presents the picture of no particular nation; he seems to have been wholly intent on drawing that of man, and certainly not under his fairest features, but perhaps under those which

strike most on the stage. He has shewn human depravity in its most shocking forms : here a brother murders a brother's son, and makes the father drink his child's blood ; there a son butchers his mother ; there a father kills his son. The author by these means thought to fulfil one of the two great ends assigned to tragedy by the Greeks, that of producing *terror*. He has even dared to carry this emotion to its most painful degree, sufficiently certain, almost to his regret, of falling short of the Greek tragedians, some of whose pieces are said to have made pregnant women miscarry. This general and sole purpose of Crebillon's works gives them a gloominess of colouring, similar in all. A like resemblance, though of a different kind, is objected to all the pieces of Racine ; but, in my opinion, with less justice. For if this admirable poet appears sometimes to copy himself, it is, at most, in his subaltern personages, who form the secondary

secondary groups in his pictures, and by no means in those who are brought on the fore-ground. Be this defect, however, real or supposed in Racine, it is that neither of Corneille nor of the author of *Zaire*. None of the tragedies of these two great writers have that family air which is so difficult to be avoided in literary productions. The tragedies of Crebillon, on the contrary, similar as they are in their tone of colouring, are still more so in the means employed by the author to produce theatrical situations. *Recognitions* are especially his most frequent resource; but let us do him the justice to confess that he uses them most happily. The recognitions of Atreus, of Electra, and particularly of Rhadamistus, are extremely striking, and at the same time as different from each other as the same circumstance can be rendered. The multiplication of this dramatic contrivance in Crebillon, the superior manner in which he has employed

it, and the constant success by which it has been attended, have almost absolutely deprived succeeding poets of so powerful an instrument, though it would have been a very happy relief to their sterility, from the easy means it offers of producing some momentary effect. We may conclude, from these observations, that if Crebillon is sometimes so gloomy as to inspire horror, he is not, what so many have since been, both gloomy and cold,—the lowest degree of dramatic mediocrity, and a proof of the most incurable want of powers in a tragic writer ! The unfortunate productions of this class may be compared to one of those dismal winter days, in which a thick fog, joined to a penetrating frost, at once benumbs and saddens all living creatures. The pieces of Crebillon, on the contrary, resemble those landscapes of majestic horror, intermingled with rocks and torrents, in which nature, by a face of terror, inspires melancholy but grand ideas,

the

the strong impression of which is preferred by the spectator to the insipidity of an ornamented but monotonous scene. This general effect of Crebillon's tragedies is not destroyed by the defects imputed to them, of languor and vulgarity in the amorous parts, of an uninteresting and embarrassed developement, and a dragging and complicated progress in the first acts; defects which also disfigure some of Corneille's best pieces, but which cannot prevent them from being immortal.

Style is the remaining consideration, and certainly an important one, since by it alone a poet, applauded at the theatre, can expect to succeed also in the closet. We have already made some remarks on this head, relative to our three principal tragic poets, and shall therefore now confine ourselves to the subject of this eulogy*.

* The translator here speaks for the author, who, in fact, has on this occasion repeated several of his remarks in the eulogy of Despréaux, particularly those intended to honour Voltaire. **TRANSL.**

Crebillon

Crebillon can scarcely be said to have more than some happy verses; but they are verses which are even involuntarily retained, verses of a character equally bold and original, which are purely his own, and the masculine roughness of which expresses as it were the writer's physiognomy. If the details of his versification will not bear to be rigorously examined, if his pieces read laboriously and ruggedly, yet the energy of his characters, and the vigorous colouring of his scenes, will always produce a great effect on the theatre, where his contemporaries seem to have assigned him a place which posterity will preserve for him, and where he will ever be mentioned among our best tragic poets.

NOTES

ON THE

EULOGY OF CREBILLON.

NOTE I.

IF many scholars of the Jesuits became great men notwithstanding the bad education they received from them, those among the fathers themselves who became illustrious were so, in like manner, notwithstanding the instruction of their noviciate, in which the youngest profelytes of the society were taught nothing for two years except three things ;—blind obedience to their superiors, devotion to the Virgin, and hatred to the Jansenists. We have known several Ex-jesuits, though greatly attached to

to the society, who have expressed their astonishment that they were not entirely brutalized by so cruel and irreparable a loss of the best years of their youth. Hence they attributed the great number of men of merit produced by the society, solely to the care they took in selecting their subjects, and to the means they provided them after the loss of the two years of noviciate, of recovering their ground by assiduous labour, and a strict employment of their time; in which points the Jesuit discipline has at least been more rational than that of so many other orders, which tends to brutalize alike the novices and the professed.

We have said, with respect to Corneille and Voltaire, as having been educated among the Jesuits, that the first of these great men always loved them, and the second a long time. It is necessary for the sake of due justice to state the reason of this difference. Corneille, who always regarded

garded and treated the Jesuits as his masters, had always found them his friends and partisans, sometimes even at the expence of Racine, whose Jansenism was obnoxious to them, and rendered them less sensible of the beauties of his works. Voltaire long had reason to be satisfied with their conduct towards him; and so long, he gave them public and repeated testimonies of his gratitude. At length, through that fatality which attended upon the latter years of their too protracted reign, they had the misfortune, or the folly, in their *Journal de Trevoux*, to attack this celebrated man, not only as a writer, but as an enemy to religion and the state. This conduct at once quashed all the gratitude of their disciple, who revenged himself upon his old masters by such satirical attacks in verse and prose as he was well capable of making. The most prudent Jesuits were much concerned at the event, and would gladly have terminated

minated a quarrel so hurtful to the society; but the war had proceeded too far for the combatants to recede; and the society, in the disastrous circumstances which ensued, became deprived of a defender, whose voice might have protected them; whereas the shafts he had been provoked to launch against them perhaps accelerated their ruin *.

NOTE II.

It is asserted, that Despréaux called this piece the work of Racine intoxicated. Through the harshness of this sentence, I think we may perceive that the young poet did not appear altogether contemptible

* It is impossible that a more direct charge of the selfish principles by which Voltaire was actuated, could be made, than is here done by his friend and partisan, who supposes that even so important a step in the progress of reason and liberty as the abolition of the society of Jesuits, would have been opposed by him, had he not been personally affronted by them. TRANSL.

to

to his severe critic. It is not given to all tragedy-makers to deserve, on their first essay, a comparison with so great a man, even supposed under the delirium of intoxication. The relation between Racine and Crebillon is, however, so small, that we can scarcely believe a comparison so void of justness to have been made by Despréaux.

NOTE III.

AN Englishman who attended the first representation of *Atreus*, told the author that his tragedy was more fitted for the London than the Paris theatre; and yet, Englishman as he was, the cup full of blood had made him shudder. The horror with which the spectators are struck by this cup is, indeed, so great and general, that whenever the players have attempted within these thirty years to revive this piece, they have never been able to obtain for it more than two representations.

NOTE IV.

THE subject of *Rhadamistus* is taken from the twelfth book of Tacitus's *Annals*, and well deserves reading. The developement of facts in this tragedy occupies part of the two first acts; and, independently of its complexity and obscurity, the style has so little elegance, to say no worse of it, that I doubt whether any spectator has had the patience to listen to and follow this long narration throughout. This gave occasion to the abbé de Chaulieu pleasantly to say, that the plot of *Rhadamistus* would have been clear enough "without the explanation."

NOTE V.

THE tragedy of *Pyrrhus*, after a long interval, was revived in 1781; but, though it was several times represented, it seems to have attracted little notice. Its plot is
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embarrassed, and its style incorrect; there are, however, fine passages in the parts of Pyrrhus and Glaucias. We have remarked that the author, who did not like his subject, was five years in finishing this piece. It is even affirmed that he would never have brought it to a conclusion, had he not been encouraged by the elder of the brothers Paris, then in high credit and power. We may suppose that this Mæcenas acted towards Crebillon as a rich man ought to do towards a needy poet. The poet in consequence dedicated his work to this patron; but he did not treat him so well, or rather so ill, as the great Corneille did the financier Montauron, in his dedication of *Cinna*, by comparing him to Augustus.

NOTE VI.

Among the old romances praised by Crebillon, he spoke with particular admiration of *Cleopatra*, which is now scarcely ever read, though it is still applauded, from tradition. Despréaux, who was almost always in the right, even when his opinion was contrary to that of his whole age, has justly appreciated this romance in a single line :

Calprenede et Juba parlent du même ton.

Juba still speaks the tongue of Calprenede *.

This want of truth in the personages and their language, with the monotony of the descriptions, and multiplicity of the incidents, which necessarily take off from the interest, make it probable that the romance of *Cleopatra*, estimable as it is in many respects, were it now to appear for the first time, would meet with little success.

* The author of the work.

It is asserted that Crebillon took his subject of Rhadamistus and Zenobia from one of those old Romances, intituled *Berenice*, much less read and esteemed than *Cleopatra*. We choose rather to believe this anecdote, than to verify it ; but, were it true, Crebillon would have the great and rare merit of having formed an excellent tragedy from a contemptible work.

NOTE VII.

CREBILLON might render himself this testimony, notwithstanding the slight transitory satire he had long before indulged himself in against his enemies ; for, in fact, it was rather sportive than bitter ; and, besides, had been so sincerely repented of by the writer, and so long pardoned even by its objects, that his auditors totally forgot it on the day of his reception. Crebillon's pen and soul were equally free

from gall, though in conversation he sometimes displayed a sufficiently unfavourable opinion of the human species. We have mentioned that he passed several years of his life in retreat, surrounded with animals, who were his sole companions. When asked the reason why he devoted himself to this profound solitude? "It is," he replied, "because I know what men are." He said this, however, without acrimony, and with the coolness of a philosopher, who laments the malice of his kind, and, while shunning their commerce, cannot resolve to hate them *.

NOTE VIII.

THE encomium we have given to the works of Crebillon the younger, belongs

* This favourable representation of the eulogist seems justified neither by the words nor the conduct of Crebillon, both which display the true misanthropy of spleen and disappointment. This sentiment may be excused in him, but should not be denied. TRANSL.

only to his first romances, which are much superior to the last. It may be added, that, even in his best works, the style is considerably liable to censure, and that the design is preferable to the colouring.

NOTE IX.

THE players gave a public and signal proof of their gratitude to the memory of Crebillon. They caused a solemn service to be performed for him in the church of St. Jean de Latran, at which they all assisted with the most respectful decorum. All the academies, the most distinguished men of letters, and a great number of persons of the highest rank, were invited to this ceremonial, and the assembly was equally brilliant and numerous. These unfortunate players, excommunicated in their own parishes, had chosen a church in a privileged place, in order that they might be sheltered from anathemas while paying the last duties to the shade of their illustrious

trious benefactor. The rector, who had been so imprudent as to receive them, soon had cause to repent his compliance. His ecclesiastical superiors exclaimed against the scandal, and thoughts were entertained of reviving the ancient ceremony of public penance, and obliging the culprit to undergo it.

The proposed mausoleum for Crebillon was solicited at court by the brother of the declared protectress of the poet, (Mad. de Pompadour,) then director-general of the royal buildings. It appears that this design was afterwards changed for that of a monument in the king's library at Paris; but this also proved abortive.

THE END,



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